

France - 2026 April 05 to April 22

I was playing bridge at the Simi Valley Senior Center when I saw a flyer advertising "Seine River from Paris to Normandy". That is one of the foreign river cruises that we had not been on. Airfare from Los Angeles was included with door-to-door pickup. On previous trips, we had failed to meet anyone who was in the local area so on this trip should have mostly people from the local area. Our previous game playing friends were not available, so we might meet some new people? As it turned out, there were 120 people on the trip with six of us from Simi Valley and the next closest was San Marcos, CA.

I looked at the airfares and found that French Bee was offering nonstop round trip to Paris/Orly for only \$500 from LAX. The travel company was willing to provide the river cruise without pickup or airfare at a substantial discount, so we signed up; we were off to Paris in a month. We planned to get there two days early for the 7-day cruise and stay in France an extra week afterwards. We could figure out the details later, so off we went without any reservations except for the first two nights. The Amadeus Diamond cruise left and returned from the Seine River near the Eiffel Tower.

We found that the new Paris Metro Line 14 (already the most crowded line in the system) went from Orly Airport to the St. Lazare rail station which was a transport center somewhat close to the cruise departure point. We found a hotel that overlooked the stop which was under a glass bubble in front of the station. Aha; minimum walking distance. We were off to explore Paris! We were last in Paris 50 years ago; we stayed in Montmartre, saw shows there, visited the Louvre and Versailles. This time we went to the new Musee d'Orsay, Aquarium, Luxembourg Garden, and Big Bus Tour.

The 7-day cruise on the Seine had stops in Conflans and Auvers-sur-Oise where famous artists found inspiration. Then there was the fascinating medieval town of Rouen, followed by the seaside rock formations at Etretat. We then boarded four buses for the all-day tour of the WorldWar2 Normandie beach landing sites and museums. On the way back, the ship stopped near the magnificent flower gardens and lily ponds at Claude Monet's home in Giverny. The variety and arrangement of colorful tulips were especially spectacular.

After the cruise, we spent several days at the Citizen-M hotel near the Paris-Lyon train station and commuted on the RER-A line to Paris Disneyland outside of town. We got the express pass to avoid waiting in lines. We would have saved several hundred dollars if we had brought Lou's handicap placard. The rides that were noteworthy were the Ratatouille Mouse and the slightly different Haunted House and Pirates of the Caribbean. There were some new stage shows and rides at the new Walt Disney Studios Park (separate admission). We wanted to spend the night at the very convenient Disneyland Hotel right next to the Main Street entrance but not for the \$2000 cost.

We then took the two-hour TGV (French abbreviation for high-speed train) line to Lyon for a two-night stay. Lyon lies between the Rhone and Saone Rivers at the confluence, and has an interesting history dating back to Roman times with has evolving architecturally different buildings. We liked the cruise on the river (narrated in both French and good English) and the outstanding restaurants/culture in town. As we arrived, we saw about 20 people dressed as Spider-Man cavorting on the central park. We have decided that we enjoy French Onion Soup and Beef Bourguignonne. Various types of French pastry were interesting. Louis liked the apricot juice and the mixed red juice.