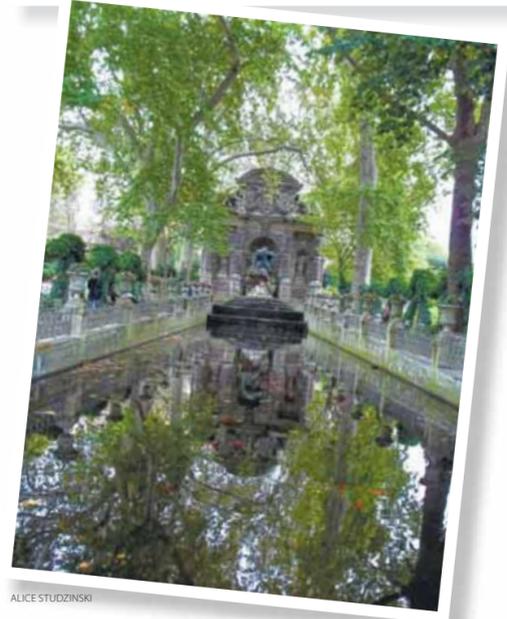
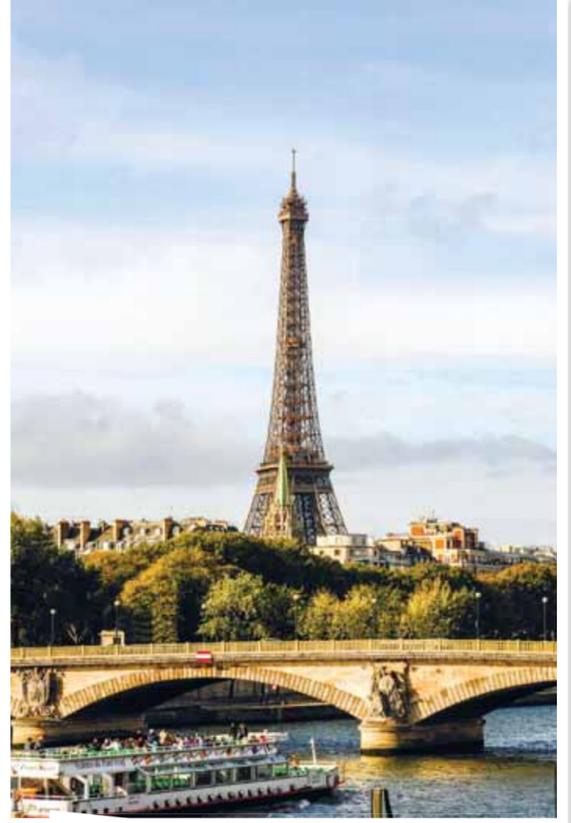




The Place de la Concorde is one of the most popular public squares and tourist destinations in Paris.



Top: A sightseeing boat on the Seine River cruises past the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Bottom: The Medici Fountain in Luxembourg Gardens gives Paris a vision of Florence.

My Paris List: Little Stars in the City of Light

By Carol Stigger

“Paris is always a good idea,” Audrey Hepburn once said.

In the midst of our heated debate between Switzerland and Italy, my sister offered “Paris” like a peace treaty, and that ended the controversy. We made a list of things to do besides buying scarves and visiting the Mona Lisa, and booked a boutique hotel in the Latin Quarter. We learned to decipher a Metro map (with a magnifying glass) along with the rewards and the limits of lists.

Parapluies Simon (Umbrellas Simon)

Located at 56 Boulevard St. Michel, this shop was not on our list. We happened upon the shop on arrival day during our jet-lagged stumble to Luxembourg Gardens, which was on the list. With its ceiling vaulted like an open umbrella, this boutique has been keeping Parisians chic and dry since 1897.

Devoted to keeping the umbrella a fashion statement instead of a boring necessity, Parapluies Simon offers approximately 3,000 umbrellas for every mood and fashion. From frilly parasols to stately gray umbrellas with ivory handles that could take on a monsoon, the shop gave us even more respect for the capitol city of style. The shop also offers umbrella repair services. “Only in Paris,” we sighed, “would one own an umbrella worth repairing.”

Luxembourg Gardens

We eventually wilted into chairs in Luxembourg Gardens and watched children sail rented toy boats in the central fountain. The gardens were created by Marie de Médicis in the 1600s to surround the Palais du Luxembourg she had constructed to replicate her childhood home: Florence’s Palazzo Pitti.

The Palais now houses the French Senate, but the gardens are open to the public and free. On Sundays, an orchestra plays in the bandstand, children ride ponies, and even adults sail toy boats. The park has many strolling paths and hundreds of moveable chairs. We read for a while beside the fountain before exploring. Two delightful finds were a miniature bronze Statue of Liberty and the Medici fountain tucked into a shady glade. Although it was early fall, flowers bloomed in formal gardens validating writer Henry van Dyke’s observation: “Paris is a woman’s town with flowers in her hair.”

Le Petit Prince

We saved the most poignant attraction on our list for our last day. The official Le Petit Prince store, 57,

Boulevard Arago, is in a quiet Parisian neighborhood. No grand marquee announces its location, and we walked by it once expecting bright lights and helium balloons. But the shop is as modest as the Little Prince and, like his asteroid, has just what we needed: silk scarves made in France, baby clothes, note cards and post cards, little cups and plates, mugs, fuzzy foxes and sheep, and the Prince’s proud rose with four thorns.

We wondered, perhaps for the first time since we were children, if the sheep ate the Prince’s cherished rose. After all these decades, it remains an important question—as important as sunsets are to the Little Prince. What do we tell the grandchildren after we read them the book and give them each a fuzzy sheep? We will tell them that the sheep did not eat the rose, because children who read the book draw what the pilot forgot to draw: a strap for the sheep’s muzzle. If you missed the book by Saint-Exupéry, it was published in 1943 and is the most read and most translated book in the French language. Our mother was reading it to us before we could toddle.

Legendary Sandwich

Lunch in the Marais District was a leap from fantasy fiction to fantastic food. Sacha Finkenstein’s, 27 rue des Rosiers, is a family-owned kosher deli and bakery serving the community since 1946. At some point, it caught on with the international community—and no wonder. Its signature sandwich with pastrami, eggplant, pickles, and tomatoes is served on a poppy seed and onion bun. We were too full for dessert, but we could not leave the cheesecake for another day. We carried two servings back to our hotel. Don’t tell Mom, but we spoiled our dinner with satin-smooth, lemon cheesecake and were whimpering for more.

French Fries in France

That night, instead of fine dining, we strolled around the Latin Quarter. Shakespeare and Company Book Store, 37 rue de la Bûcherie, was a special treat with its maze of rooms and selection of books both current and rare. That first edition of Babar the fictional elephant was hard to pass up.

Hunger struck with a surprising twist. “I want to eat French fries in France,” my sister said. We bought French fries at a gyros shop and carried our snacks to a park bench facing the Seine River. Notre Dame gleamed under floodlights and the moon rose as we finished our fries and agreed with Hepburn that Paris is always a good idea.

Carol Stigger is a Chicago-based writer specializing in travel, microfinance, and developing nation poverty. She spends most springs in Rome researching articles on ancient and modern Italy and many winters in India as a volunteer teacher and communications specialist for a community development organization.

Paris is always a good idea.
Audrey Hepburn



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