

Post



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# Paris and Vaux-le-Vicomte - May 9, 2022

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Our plan today is to have a nice breakfast and go to the château de Vaux-le-Vicomte. If you know Versailles, the amazing palace of Louis XIV, you should know the one that inspired it. That's where we're headed today. It was Louis' financial minister who built Vaux-le-Vicomte, and where the money came from is anyone's guess, but the King wasn't amused.

A good breakfast in Paris isn't hard to find. We have our favorite places and head to one of them. We get the 'complete' breakfast: coffee, freshly squeezed juice, pastries, bread with butter and jams, and an omelet. Yum!

Getting to Vaux-le-Vicomte is harder. Over breakfast we try to figure out how to get there. Bus? Train? Cab? Combo? Tour? Everything we come up with takes too much time, money and/or steps. \$2,500 will get you an evening flyover in a helicopter (We're not sure if that's per person, and we're not asking).

So we rent a car at Hertz at Tour Montparnasse. We don't have a reservation, so we're hoping they have cars. They do. Automatic? Laugh, no. OK, Manual then. One day. 191 euros? Sounds cheap (if you divide by four and plug your ears and say LA LA LA LA LA).

We talk to the Hertz agent in our best French and think we got a nicer, larger car due to that. He needs to see my passport. I don't have it with me. How about a picture? No. Finally, my Hertz loyalty number, the picture of my passport and Karen's passport (which is only off by one digit) and he waives the need to see my passport.

We get the manual car, drive up the four floors to get to the street and we're on our way. Paris streets are hard enough to walk and driving is even more crazy. Thank heavens for smart phones and GPS. It's a long way to Vaux-le-Vicomte, but we're there in an hour or so. But first we want to have lunch.

Online we find a well-reviewed place named "L'Usine", which means "The Factory". Sounds appetizing. It's 1pm. We don't have a reservation, but they seat us. The place is big and crowded. It's in the middle of no where but apparently they have a winning formula. The menu is huge, the place is huge, the servings are huge, the patrons are huge. Got it.

Each of our two couples splits a burger and fries. Even that is more food than any of us needs. Meanwhile, at the table across the aisle from us a big (big) French guy ate one by himself. With an onion ring and extra patty on the burger. Then he has a huge serving of profiteroles with ice cream for dessert! So much food! We speak French with him. We explain about going to Vaux-le-Vicomte. That's nice, he says. And then explains how much he loves the food at this restaurant. That's obvious.

Finally, we make the last few kilometers to the Vaux-le-Vicomte. Like the lunch servings, it's huge, and well put together. The entrance to the main house is through the old horse stable where they have pretend horses and real carriages and coaches from back in the day. They have so many of them and they're in such good condition. We also see riding apparel, saddles, and the metal things they put in the horses' mouths to control them. Poor animals.

We finally go to the Vaux-le-vicomte proper. It's worth visiting. Visiting with us is two or three other groups. It's pretty empty. Along with seeing the castle and grounds we get a pair of over-the-ear headphones. The sound is exquisite and the production quality is first rate. As you enter each room the next segment starts. It's a bit unnerving. You hear glasses clinking, a fire crackling, the wind blowing and people talking from all around you. I keep thinking that what I am hearing really is in the room with me.

The story takes you through the building being built, the party to show it to everyone (including the king), the king being suspicious and PO'ed, the viscount going to jail, etc. Bottom line? We have a nice building and grounds to tour now. The tail-end of the tour is through the kitchen which Karen loves. Back outside we tour the grounds. They're sooo big. We don't walk everything be we walk forever. At the far end, looking back at the Chateau, is a golden statue of Hercules (naked). He is (all of him) huge.

We drive back to Paris. It's rush hour. It's a bit scary but we survive. We ask our smart phones where to find gas and fill the car. We never see gas stations in Paris but they're there. Back at Tour Montparnase we drop the car back on level -4. We hike up the stairwell. It seems someone/thing has been using it as a latrine for a long time, and/or died there. You could wait for the elevator or hold your nose and run up the four flights of stairs. No one in our group (or other groups) wait. Everyone runs.

We walk the short distance to Hertz and drop off the car. Everyone's hungry and happy with the thought of Pizza. There's a Pizza Roma near by and it has reasonable reviews online. We park ourselves and get wine to celebrate the successes of the day (including not crashing a car). The waitress is a hoot. She is from Portugal. She gave as good as she got from us (after we had a few glasses of wine). In the end she's showing us pictures of her kids and husband. We had a great day. We walk home and crash. Tomorrow's another day (shudder).

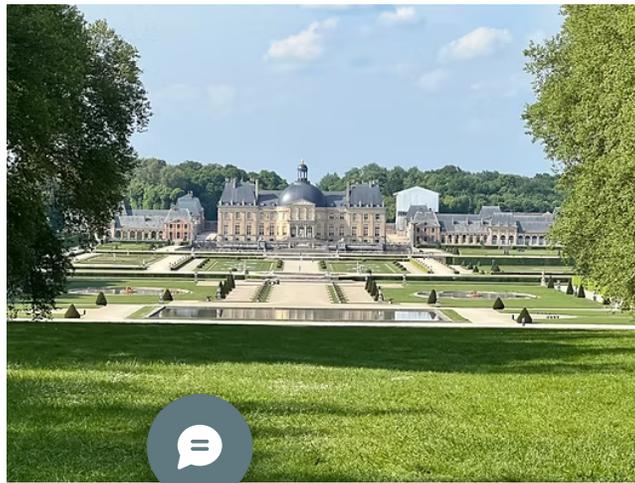
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