

Post



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May 11, 2022 · 7 min read

Paris Foodie Walking Tour - May 11, 2022

Updated: Feb 22, 2023

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Another day, more excitement scheduled. We've added 'food tours' to the itineraries of a number of recent trips. Karen thought Paris might be a good place to do it again. Before we arrived she signed us up for a three hour foodie/walking tour in the Pigalle district of Paris. It's where the Moulin Rouge night club is. We don't know a lot about that part of Paris.

We take the metro to the stop where we're meeting our guide. All we know is that our guide is supposed to have the name of the tour company "Eating Europe" on the back of his (or her) shirt.

We wait quite a while at the Pigalle metro stop. We're outside in the warm sun and there are lots of other people awaiting many tours in English and other languages. A few times someone came up and asked if we were waiting for the xyz tour in German, or some other language. No.

Eventually a big, bearded guy with lots of tattoos and a jacket with many patches (including one from South Africa) shows up. He introduces himself as PJ (like the sleeping attire) and he goes around and meets each couple and determines where everyone is from. It turns out we're homogeneous: all from the US: Baltimore, Oregon, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

PJ walks us up to the map of Paris showing all the metro lines. He explains how Paris started and grew and grew and grew. He steps us through how the walls protecting Paris kept being moved, as the city grew. They eventually ended up where we are now. He explains how the men were conscripted and only the women were left and how they had few profitable skills other than selling their bodies. Some do-gooder organization set up the Moulin Rouge to allow the girls to make money without having to sell their bodies. They danced at night (and made good money) and during the day they set up shops with their money and made even more money. The area was outside the city walls where it was cheaper (no taxes), with hills and so people didn't want to live there. Thus those who did live here took good care of each other. That's where we'll be exploring today.

We walk up the hill and PJ explains why these shops and markets, selling fruits and vegetables, or meat, or liquors, or etc. are so good. He tells us how to find the best of each. We are sold and Karen feverishly takes notes. We can't wait to come back.

We step into a boulangerie and each get a heavenly pain au chocolate and hot beverage of our choice. PJ shows how patisseries have been changing over time. Paris-Brest was from the race between those two cities and the pastry was big and round, like a bicycle wheel forever. Now that's too much to eat, so it's just a short straight piece that's fewer calories.

We stop in front of other businesses and PJ explains why they are the best. His logic makes sense. He stops at another Boulanger and buys several types of bread. We'll be going to HIS restaurant later and we'll need bread for that. We stop at a cheese shop, and he explains all there is to know about cheese. He polls the group about our preferences: safe or smelly? We vote and he buys an assortment of strong cheeses.

We stop at a wall where "I love you" is written in every possible language in the world, including Latin, Aramaic, Brail, binary, hieroglyphics, and cuneiform. We get our pictures taken in front of the huge panel. PJ points out how there's amazing violin music playing, birds chirping, the wind blowing through the trees, kids playing. Life is good. This is a wonderful part of Paris.

We hike through more of the neighborhood and hear about how the hipsters, with their high-tech jobs, are taking over. They're pricing the businesses out of the hood as the hipsters are turning the businesses into apartments. They don't care that there's no neighborhood or businesses because they buy all their stuff from Amazon and get their groceries and meals delivered by Uber Eats and other services.

Thoroughly depressed we head down the street until we're in front of his small restaurant on the corner. Up the hill above the restaurant is an old windmill. He tells us that was used to grind flour and also limestone. That made so much white dust that when the wind blew everyone, and everything, turned white. As such the nearby metro station (to this day) is named Blanche. We inquire as to whether this was the windmill of the famous Renoir painting (Moulin de la Gallette). No, he replies, that's the next windmill a block down to the east. We swoon in unison.

Our group shuffles into the tiny restaurant. There's one tall table with seating for twelve. Being eleven, plus one (PJ), we just fit. There's also a bar and stairs leading up to more seating in the small upstairs. Each place has a napkin, silverware, a water glass and two wine glasses. The silverware wasn't too fancy, but there is a pair of snail tongs at each place. There is also a snail plate which we are sure bodes well for the future.

PJ produces a bottle of muscadet and a chardonnay from Burgundy. He has our attention now. PJ explains, in painful detail, how and why you taste these wines, what you want to look for, how your handling of the wine would be interpreted by the vintner or a sommelier at a restaurant. All the while we have no wine, so are merely salivating at his descriptions. Eventually the wine is served in the two glasses, and we are told just to throw it back to prepare our pallets. Just have fun. We don't object and quickly the glasses are empty and refilled. Fuller this time.

More explanations and soon plates of snail and bread appears. We're told how the French came to eat frogs, snails and the like. As so frequently is the case the church is to blame. They told their flock that "true Christians" only eat things from above the soil and only animals eat roots (like carrots and beets). We gingerly eat our snails, careful not to send them flying across the small restaurant with our spring-loaded holders. They're chewy but tender and swimming in butter and garlic. They're good and lead us to another variety of wine.

The conversation is getting louder with each new course and wine pairing. PJ is telling us stuff but half the group is just talking excitedly amongst ourselves. The next course is beef bourguignon. The servings aren't skimpy and there's delicious red wine to go with it, seemingly from an inexhaustible supply. Earlier in the tour we'd heard about how the French Baguette came to be, about how it came to be made of white flour and weighed exactly 250 grams (and used 250 ml of water and was cooked at 250 degrees C and cost 1 euro). Similarly the Beef Bourguignon used 5 KGs of beef, and 5 liters of water and cooked for 5 hours at 500 degrees, or some such legend. We didn't care. It is delicious. It wasn't "by the book", we could tell (as there were no pearl onions or carrots in it) but it was very good.

Cheese is next. With more wine. It is heavenly. It's explained to us how to cut and enjoy the cheese. PJ promised strong cheeses and he delivered.

Dessert will be 'on the road'. We are to have four dessert courses, which is ludicrous given how full and soused we all are. Our first dessert stop is at a 'chouquette' shop, which sells perfect chou pastries with pearl sugar on top. They go down much too easily for people as full as we. We are out of PJ's restaurant by now, but he is with us with a half dozen champagne flutes in each hand and two bottles of French champagne in the pockets of his vest. We are really liking this guy. We're about five hours into our three hour foodie walking tour and we are thinking we are getting close to the end.

Our next stop is for dessert, like we really needed any, at a cute shop that specializes in macarons and chocolates. They have maybe a dozen or two flavors of each. We get to specify two flavors of macarons and two flavors of chocolate per person. One of the flavors of chocolate that was/wasn't being pushed was wasabi! Of course Scott included that as one of his choices. The macarons and chocolates are put into small bags and it is suggested that we not eat them now. We should save them for later when we're hungry again. (Some time far in the future, we think).

The last stop (praise be unto Allah) is at a crêperie. Like the previous shop they have many flavors to choose from. Thankfully each of us only has to pick one crêpe flavor (to go with the copious champagne that PJ is now pouring). The crêpes, like everything else, are divine. The champagne, like the other alcohol served this day, was good and poured non-stop. We eat and sip and say our fond, inebriated good-byes, both to our fellow tour members, but especially to PJ. He is tipped handsomely, and we try (unsuccessfully) to learn of any other tours he leads. In our group we all agree this was the best, most outrageous food tour we'd been on. We also agree that dinner is no longer a need.

We hike up past both windmills, up to the basilica of Sacre Cœur on top of the butte of Montmartre. There are restaurants, but few portrait sketch artists, as in years past. There's still tons of tourists. We walk down the interminable steps back to the flats and catch the metro back home. We relax back home before eventually head off to bed. Tomorrow will be another day, but surely not as crazy as today was!

Photos





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