

Post



Scott Farnsworth

Jun 23, 2025 · 8 min read

A different Paris underground - June 23, 2025

SUMMARY

Our last day in Paris, sob! First thing in the morning we go shopping for the “usual suspects”, groceries we try to bring home from France each visit. Then something new - a boat ride on the Canal St. Martin, through several locks and a long underground tunnel to the Seine and on to the Musée d’Orsay. Drinks at a favorite bar, Au Sauvignon, and dinner at my very favorite restaurant, Le Récamier, for a last (2) soufflé! - Karen

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DETAIL

Well, y'all, this is it, the last post of our Europe 2025 vacation. Tomorrow we are scheduled to fly back to that tenuous experiment in democracy called the "united" states. But we'll save that for another day, for today we have plans: grocery shopping, a cruise on a canal boat through Paris, and dinner at a favorite restaurant.

When we woke, first order of business was seeing if my modification to the cooling system worked. We slept, so on that count we're good. But the numbers didn't suggest as much success. The outside temp is in the upper 50s and inside the room it's in the high 70s to low 80s. Something did lower the humidity so it felt cool (enough). Only one more night of that and then that'll be history.

I put a couple more quart ziplock bags of water into the small freezer, hoping for solid blocks of ice by tomorrow morning. We'll need to keep the perishable food in our luggage cool for 23 or more hours.

At the nearby Monoprix grocery store we find almost everything we're looking for (other than the foie gras, which we'll keep seeking). Walking around, after shopping, and it's lovely outside, still only 69°, and it's 11:30. We take the metro up towards the north-east corner of Paris, to an area called "La Villette" to catch some lunch and then board the canal boat tour back into the heart of the city. We have been to this section of the city, mostly for concerts way back when, but otherwise we've not spent a lot of time here. It's nice. We'll have to come back.

We aim our GPSs for a restaurant called 211 on the canal proper. It's a bar/restaurant and has gotten good reviews. It's perfectly situated for us to catch our tour after, alas, as we get closer we double check that it's open (today's Monday) and... it's not. Whoops! We quickly look up a couple of other possible places to eat and head that way, over a bridge over this canal and over that canal. And, they're full, crap. Back over the bridge to another place and it's open and can accommodate us. Simonetta, for Italian food. We get to sit outside, overlooking the canal, and the food is really good. A parpadelle pasta with pistachio sauce with crushed pistachios and creme and cheese. Yum!

Full, we head for our cruise. We have no idea what to expect. Will the boat be big, small, tall, short? The canal's not too wide, so that's going to limit things, and closer to town the canal is covered (part of the attraction), so it can't be too tall, can it? Onboard we find the boat is two stories, and we (and everyone) sit upstairs, in the sun. There's a bar (yay) but it's closed (boo).

As we get underway, being just a few feet from the dock, and older (?) German couple come running towards the boat, yelling for us to wait. The captain puts the boat in reverse and picks them up. How nice is that? Our tour guide introduces herself over the PA system and the captain, those two being the totality of the crew. She's French but her English is really good. She speaks everything in French and then in English.

We'd cleverly seated ourselves on one side of the boat, to see the most stuff, and the boat, of course, immediately turns around. Oh well. Our guide points out things of interest, including the La Villette area itself, which used to be a wholly separate city from Paris. Under orders of Napoleon III and the prefect Baron Haussmann the area was made the slaughter house for all of Paris. One can imagine what it did to the water, which then flowed through Paris and to the Seine. At its height it handled up to 4,500 head of cattle a day. Ugh. No more, thankfully.

We hear about Bitch Square, which was here. When the US wanted that area for its Embassy and other buildings the square was relocated so that the Americans didn't have to say they work on Bitch Square.

We go through locks, lots of them. Each lowers the boat three meters and they're in pairs. They'd love to just have one lock and lower the boat six meters, but the technology couldn't accommodate that, so we go through many locks to get to the Seine, a total drop of 27 meters (almost 89 feet)! At each lock is a bridge for pedestrians and invariably lots of interested people watching the action.

We go by a "lift" bridge, which lifts straight up to let the boat pass, and two 'turn bridges' that turn to allow the boat to pass. They're all used multiple times a day, despite their age. There's a hospital nearby and if both of the turn bridges are turned the ambulances would be stuck so the rules state that only one can be turned at a time.

We hear about the canal being totally drained every 10 years for maintenance. Apparently when they do that all kinds of interesting things are found. The next time this will happen? 2026. It's tempting to ensure we're here!

“We have a medical emergency, is there a doctor or nurse on board!!?” Say what? We didn’t sign up for this! Apparently the running German couple shouldn’t have been exerting themselves quite so much and mein frau isn’t doing well. A nurse rushes to her aid and the boat pulls over to the shore at the next legal spot. An ambulance is called and the two (only two) crew members clamber ashore to eventually guide the EMTs to the waiting patient. All aboard are anxiously awaiting the ambulance, assessing each vehicle as it comes by asking ourselves, “Is that an ambulance? Or is that an ambulance?” Finally a big vehicle pulls up and stops. It’s a garbage truck. Hm, that seems a bit harsh, don’t you think? Finally an emergency vehicle does appear and they get the passenger in distress, and her husband, ashore and we press on. Whew!

We hear more history and more buildings are pointed out, including one involving the knights templar and some debt owed the King of France. The debt couldn’t be paid and so the king came up with an equitable resolution. The knights templar we were put a few dozen of their men on an island and they were all burnt to death. Problem solved. Yikes!

Eventually we're almost to Seine level and we go from being in open air to being in an enclosed tunnel through which the canal will continue to beyond the Place to la Bastille and almost to the Seine. Inside we soon are backing up. The captain revs his engines and floors it, getting the boat up to its maximum speed. What the what? It's explained to us just as we're passing two big warning signs that say (in essence) "you have only 18 minutes to traverse this next section and you best not fail". Yikes again!

Going through this underground part is fun and cool, temperature-wise. It's dark-ish but there are circular openings in the ceiling every so many meters. It's fun but strange. As we go under the big statue in the center of the Place de la Bastille we pass directly under it and there are big, church-like arched openings overhead so some reason.

Through one more lock and we're on the Seine. We pass Notre Dame and all of the various bridges, hearing this history of each as we glide beneath. It's fascinating. Eventually we're dropped off at the Orsay Museum and start our hike home. We have a dinner reservation at Le Récamier, Karen's favorite restaurant in Paris. We compare that time to how long it'll take us to walk and quickly switch to Plan B, taking the RER (regional rail). It appears in a couple of minutes and whisks us quickly the one stop to our apartment. Taking the metro would have been more like a half dozen stops!

We do find our foie gras at another grocery before heading to Au Sauvignon for drinks before dinner. The food and wine and service at Le Récamier are tasty and fun, as always. They light the Grand Marnier on fire on our dessert soufflé, which we don't recall from prior visits.

We're asking ourselves if we're ready to go home, after six plus weeks. As we ponder the question we get a message from the airline on which we're flying out of Paris tomorrow. Schedule change! Maybe our flight's been canceled and we'll be staying in Paris another day or two? No such luck. They're just pushing out our departure time by 50 minutes. Our connecting flight out of Newark already got pulled in, so less time waiting in Newark, but hopefully enough time for we (and our luggage and cold groceries) to make it.

[That's all folks. Thanks for coming with us on this trip. We hope to see you next trip.]

Photos



Morning step one was to assess the success of the vent (pretty OK) and step two was to close the window (while gingerly ensuring my franken-vent doesn't fall apart).



Why can't we just leave the window open, you ask? Due to this carefully constructed, and hung, warning in our apartment. Thieves? Through the windows? On the 5th floor? OK, what'evs.



Speaking of being careful, these windows will hit you in the head, if you're not careful. I wasn't and... ouch!



We finally find a place we can have lunch.
Yay!



Full from lunch, and with bit of spitting
from the clouds, we head to our cruise
tour boat.



Aboard, with lots of other people, we float down the canal, hearing the history of this area: La Villette.



Many interesting buildings. We'll have to return (on foot) and investigate more!



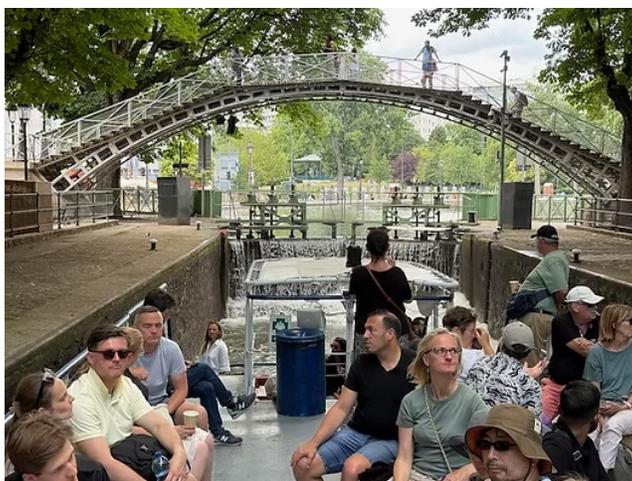
Our tour guide and, behind her, the tunnel our boat is supposed to fit through. Hm. It seems too low!



Lowered six meters (~18 feet) we just barely fit through the opening.



We did see some anti-US graffiti. Maybe this is that, too? Pretty sharp claws on that Bald Eagle.



At each lock is a pedestrian bridge,
always with some curious pedestrians. It
was fun watching the water falls made by
the upstream lock gates.



Finally the French ambulance shows up to
aid the passenger, on our boat, in distress.



Continuing on, a portion of road gets out
of our way by turning. This is one of two
turn bridges on our route.



FARNSNIENTE

There's a walkway on either side, but I don't think they want everyday Joes (or Jacques) walking them.



Every few meters there is a vent to the surface. Cindy tries to capture the perfect picture thereof.





Under the statue in the center of the Place de la Bastille is where we are, and these special openings (of which there are two) give us light and give people topside a view of the underground canal.



Dinner at Le Récamier. Yum. I always have a soufflé but this time I thought I'd try something different. A smoked salmon burger. OK, but back to a soufflé next time.



Dessert to cap off our dinner (and trip): A Grand Marnier flambé dessert soufflé.
Bye, trip, it's been fun. See you next time, we hope.

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