

Having just spent three weeks in Paris on my own, I can recommend it. I had lots of negative comments prior to going about the “what ifs”. My thoughts were “Well, if I did not go out in my car because “what if I had an accident”, I would never venture anywhere so, despite some feelings of trepidation, I did it alone and what an adventure it turned out to be.

From the airport, I caught the train into Paris (and even found myself explaining to other travellers where to go and what to do!!). I alighted the train at the station closest to my hotel and got a taxi from there. At the airport station, I was also given a great map of Paris.

I had a couple of really good guide books (One a Spiral Guide put out by AAA Publishing, which I believe is the UK equivalent to our RACQ, and the other a pocket & guide put out by DK Eyewitness Travel which I bought at Angus & Robertson). Both were small and, therefore, easy to carry. I also had a pack of cards “50 Walks in Paris”. These were great – I studied them prior to going and only took those that I needed. One handy hint, I found I could easily do two or three walks in a day so, in hindsight, I could have taken more cards with me. However, my days were very full so I will just have to return to do the rest!! I used the map given to me at the airport a lot as it was quite detailed.

I had great accommodation on the Boulevard Poissonnaire a couple of doors down from the Grevin Wax Museum and about 15 minute walk to the Louvre, 20 minutes to Sacre Coeur in Montmartre, maybe 40 minutes to Arc d’Triomphe. I did not hurry anywhere, just strolled along enjoying the scenery.

I used the “Hop-on Hop-off” bus and boat early on which was great as it gave me a good sense of direction and distance from place to place. It was also nice to get a view from a height prior to walking the streets.

I mixed my days by going to Museums one day, gardens the next, maybe followed by a trip to a big Department Store or a stroll down the Left Bank and the Latin Quarter and every few days doing a tour – Giverney, Versailles, Fontainebleau, Brugge (in Brussels), a great Shopping Outlet built like an old village and even a trip to Disneyland Paris. With such variety, I never felt that I could not handle one more church or museum nor did I get them confused. I also met some lovely people along the way and, the bonus of being on my own, is that people were very open in inviting me to join them at dinner, lunch or, on one occasion, a buggy ride in the beautiful gardens of Vaux le Vicomte.

People ask what was my best experience and it is very hard to say but I would not have missed Giverney or Vaux le Vicomte (which was included with the Fontainebleau tour) and walking Paris is really the way to go – I came across a couple of lovely churches that are not on the tourist list as they need some restoration but were, nevertheless, really special. I loved the Paris architecture and it was wonderful in my third week not to need a map (not that it mattered as people everywhere were walking around with maps).

The shop windows were really amazing – The Parisians have such style and the decoration of the windows, especially high fashion and florists, were really so beautiful – I kept having to buy more film!! After a trip to Italy a few years ago, I showed my photos to my son whose comment was, “Thanks for that tour of windows and doors of Italy, Mum”. Well, now I can give him a tour of windows and doors of Paris!

I met two lovely 5W ladies – I had exchanged a couple of emails with Zena Riou prior to leaving Brisbane and phoned her in Paris. We arranged to have dinner one evening and she brought with her another 5W member from Canberra. They were both really lovely ladies and we had a very nice evening together.

Everywhere I went, I found the people really lovely and very helpful. I always said “Bonjour” rather than “Hello” and became very good at following this immediately with “Parlez-vous anglais?” Almost everyone speaks English so I had absolutely no problem.

All in all, I was very glad that I had opted to stay in one hotel for the entire three weeks as there was no stress of packing and unpacking and, although I did a great deal, I still felt rested at the end of the holiday and now have so many wonderful memories to look back on.

On my way home, I stopped at Dubai for 3 days and went to High Tea at the Burj Al Arab. The view was so spectacular, I felt close to tears just seeing it.

It was expensive but well worth doing. Imelda Lewis