Taking Our Sweet Time — Strolling Paris and London
by Nancy Bestor

When planning our recent trip to Paris and London, Bob and I were sure of two things. We wanted to eat good food, and we wanted to explore both cities on foot, without being concerned with the main tourist sights. We had previously visited both places, so rather than rushing about, buying tickets and fighting crowds at the Louvre or the Tower of London, for example, we just wanted to take our sweet time and soak up the atmosphere in these European capitals. Don’t get me wrong, both of those sights, as well as the many, many others that Paris and London have to offer, are terrific, but we didn’t feel the need to revisit them. Instead we rambled through pleasant parks and charming neighborhoods, lingered over delicious meals in cafes, restaurants, and food markets, and cheerfully detoured when something unexpectedly caught our fancy. Here are a few highlights.

On our first full day in Paris, which happened to be a Sunday, Bob and I stepped out from our delightfully petite lodgings in the 7th arrondissement, the Hotel du Champ de Mars, to get a feel for the surrounding area. One of Rick Steves’ top choices in Paris, this hotel is both small and adorable. It has a great location in the classic Rue Cler neighborhood. The pedestrian lane that is Rue Cler is one of the world’s great market streets. It boasts cheese shops, produce stands, fish markets, bars, boulangeries, and more, and is an outstanding spot to feel just like a local. I can’t say that I dress like a Parisian, with my black Doc Martens shoes and ExOfficio travel pants, and I can’t say that I talk like a Parisian either, seeing as how my French vocabulary consists of about 10 words. But when I’m sipping a cafe au
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Great New Products — Just in Time for Your Summer Travels

This year is shaping up to be a great one at Travel Essentials, and we’re adding new merchandise to the store nearly every day. Here are some of our newest and most favorite items.

Patagonia Torrentshell Jacket
We’re delighted to now offer Patagonia clothing and bags. Why? Well first and foremost, Patagonia makes terrific products. For everything from clothing and accessories to backpacks, duffels and more, Patagonia sets the standard for usability, durability and casual style. And on top of all that Patagonia stands behind each and every single item they sell. If any Patagonia product fails in any way, at any time, Patagonia will repair it free of charge. One of our favorites is their waterproof and packable Torrentshell Jacket. Its lightweight and pliable, 100% recycled nylon exterior is waterproof yet breathable and allows for a garment that stuffs into one of its two zippered hand pockets for
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25 Years Gone & We’re Still Truckin’ On
by Robert Bestor

Twenty-five years ago it was little more than a whim. We had returned to the Bay Area after our honeymoon. Not just any honeymoon, mind you. But a six-month tour of the US of A in a Volkswagen pop-top camper honeymoon. We’d been cruising the highways and by-ways of America, visiting friends and family, exploring national parks, and enjoying a relaxed life on the road that also included stops in some of our country’s finest small towns like San Luis Obispo, Sedona, Durango, Savannah, Key West, Plattsmouth (shout out to the Bestor family roots!), Ann Arbor, Ashland, and more. Perhaps we caught the small town bug. Or perhaps, after six months of living the continued on page 6
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lait and nibbling on a fresh croissant on a chilly winter morning at Bar PTT Brasserie on Rue Cler, I feel like a local, and that's good enough for me.

Fighting off jet-lag, we took a roundabout route on our way to an early lunch in the Marais district, on falafel row in the Jewish quarter. We'd been salivating about the falafel sandwiches (7 euros each) from L'As du Falafel since our last trip to Paris, and they were every bit as delectable as we remembered. The line for a table at this shop is often quite long, but if you get your falafel at the "to go" window, and don't mind eating it on a nearby bench, you'll be scarfing it down in no time at all.

We then made our way to the open air market just north of Place de la Bastille, to check out the local food shopping scene. The Marche de la Bastille is open on Thursdays and Sundays, and runs for about a half mile along Richard Lenoir Boulevard. The fresh produce, fish, cheese, bread, and other stalls were very busy, and chalk full of great food.

A good number of museums in Paris are free on the first Sunday of the month, and since this was just such a Sunday, we thought we might “pop in” to a few, even those we had visited previously, and see some of our favorite art. But after walking by the Louvre and the Musee d’Orsay and seeing lengthy lines of folks waiting to get in, we gave up on the “pop in” idea. Frankly, I’d rather pay to get in to a museum than wait over an hour in line to get in for free, but I’m in my 50s now, so of course I would. We did happen upon a short line outside of the Musee de l’Orangerie late that afternoon, on the spur of the moment, we joined the queue to see Monet’s famous Water Lilies paintings, among other things. We didn’t realize until we got to the entrance that this was one of the “first Sunday of the month free” museums, so we took that as a win.

In person, the Water Lilies were far more spectacular than I had imagined. Not really being much of an art connoisseur, I had no idea that these works were so impressively large. They are hung in two specially designed oval rooms, as stipulated by Monet himself in 1922, when he donated the paintings to France. There are other interesting works of art in the Orangerie, but nothing close to the Water Lilies. I highly recommend a visit.

Another favorite sight was a visit to the extremely popular Catacombs. Twenty meters and 131 steps below street level, the Catacombs of Paris are a mile long labyrinth of tunnels holding the remains of more than six million people. I wasn't sure how I would feel about such a potentially macabre sight, but the Catacombs are actually quite beautiful. Bones and skulls are arranged in a terrifyingly artistic and respectful manner, and the display goes on and on and on. Only 200 people are allowed below ground at one time, so it never felt crowded. The audio guide, which comes with an advance ticket purchase, had outstanding information. For 29 euros, we booked our tickets in advance for the time and day we wanted to visit. Tickets are 13 euros if you show up and wait in line, and they don't come with the audio guide, but we'd read that the wait can be hours long, so again, because I'm in my 50s, I'm willing (and thankfully can afford) to pay more for better services.

The only hitch in our Catacombs visit was that on the day of our scheduled visit, city workers were “on a social movement,” and there was a sign on the door saying that the Catacombs were closed because of it. This was our only experience with the “yellow vest” movement. We came back at the same time the next day, and were immediately ushered in with our previous day’s timed tickets, so no harm, no foul.

Paris was delightful, but we needed to move on for our visit with the Brits. We traveled between London and Paris on the Eurostar, otherwise known as the Chunnel. This trip was uneventful and extremely easy, taking just over two hours ($160 each for roundtrip tickets). We boarded at the Gare du Nord train station in Paris and hopped off at the St. Pancras International Station in London. The trip was seamless and quite comfortable.

We rented a flat in the West Kensington neighborhood of London. It was a delightfully quirky yet perfect one bedroom, in a central location. From here, we ventured out on several self-guided walking tours, all thanks to Rick Steves’ London guidebook, including a West End walk, and a walk along the South Bank of the Thames. We toured the Old Operating Theater Museum (6.5 pounds each), where a docent performed a “mock operation” in the original surgical operating room from the 1800s. Let’s just say that I’m glad for modern medicine with its anesthesia, its emphasis on hygiene, and its precision surgical instruments. The museum offers a fascinating look at thankfully obsolete torture devices, surgical equipment, early remedies for illnesses and disease, and more, all in the attic of the St. Thomas Church, originally part of St. Thomas Hospital. It’s well worth a stop.

Since we’re from Ashland, Oregon, we had to pop in to Shakespeare’s Globe Theater. And although we didn’t see any performances, we did get to look around and talk with an extremely enthusiastic Globe employee who recommended other local theaters and plays. And three times during our four-day London stay, we visited the Borough Market, a delicious food-centric market with an amazing array of wonderfully prepared comestibles on offer. We are both still regularly experiencing mouth-watering memories of wild mushroom risotto, perfect paella, and sumptuous macaroni and cheese with bacon. And the donuts, oh dear god the donuts. We each had a vanilla custard stuffed donut.

"Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all of one's lifetime." — MARK TWAIN

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Gastronomic Adventures in French Cuisine

by Robert Bestor

So this is a story about dining in Paris. And don’t worry, we’re going to get there. But first, I think it might help to understand who your dear writer really is. You’ve been warned.

I am a street food kind of guy. I like to eat where “the people” eat. Find me a busy food cart or market stall anywhere and I’m in. You know those spots. The best ones are crowded around by locals from all walks of life. If you see a crowd of hard working folk hovering around, you know it’s good. If you also see a smattering of business suits among them, it’s likely going to be even better. Throw in some little kids sent to pick up lunch or dinner for their family, or motorcycle messengers taking away bags filled with stacks of containers with food for neighborhood delivery, and you’ve likely hit the jackpot.

My type of place is run for the most part by a family who has been perfecting a few local specialties for years, if not decades. Your meal is expertly tossed together from a small but fabulous array of fresh ingredients right before your very eyes. With everything in plain sight, language is no barrier. Point to what you want and hold up how many fingers you want of it, and you’re good.

We’ve eaten at places like this the world over. And when we do, whether it’s Bangkok, Mexico City, Shanghai, Portland, Tuscany, Delhi or wherever, it’s almost always excellent. In fact, just up the road from us here in the Rogue Valley is a Mexican grocery/restaurant that ticks all the boxes. We were there once with my parents, and after a couple of bites of a mighty tasty chorizo taco, my Dad noted that while they often spend quite a bit more to eat out, they never get anything better than what he was eating right then and there. They certainly get food as good. But better? No. Those tacos are $1.25. All of this brings me to French cuisine.

And, more specifically, to dining in Paris. Now with what you’ve read thus far, you’ve likely surmised that if I have to wear a sport coat, I’m probably not interested. If I have to wear a tie, I’m definitely not interested. White tablecloths, maître d’s, dishes described in hushed, reverent tones, and encyclopedic wine lists do little for me. Full disclosure, I did not get the wine gene. I like it. A lot. But when it comes to discussions of varietals, tannins, finishes and the like, well…let’s just say that I know that Reginald Martinez Jackson hit a two-run homer in game seven of the 1973 World Series to power the Oakland Athletics to victory. I know. It’s a serious shortcoming.

Therefore, for personal growth, when Nancy and I booked our trip to Paris, I took it upon myself to handle all the particulars of our evening meals in the City of Light. I decided that despite my discomfort and skepticism, this quintessential feature of French life had to be experienced. But, with its complex menus, sommeliers, a massive language barrier, and the cliché of the pompous and condescending French waiter (clichés exist for a reason, right?), this guy, who braves truck stop diners in Tuscany, Delhi or wherever, it’s almost always excellent. In fact, just up the road from us here in the Rogue Valley is a Mexican grocery/restaurant that ticks all the boxes. We were there once with my parents, and after a couple of bites of a mighty tasty chorizo taco, my Dad noted that while they often spend quite a bit more to eat out, they never get anything better than what he was eating right then and there. They certainly get food as good. But better? No. Those tacos are $1.25.

All of this brings me to French cuisine.

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Great New Products — Just In Time for Summer

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easy storage. For increased comfort, the Torrentshell ($129) also boasts vented pit zips, DWR (durable water repellent) zippers, and a two-way adjustable hood that rolls down and stows away when not needed. Patagonia’s Torrentshell Jacket is available for men and women.

Moleskine Journals
I don’t know what this says about my memory and my age, but a necessity for every trip Bob and I take is a small, Moleskine Cahiers Journal to record details of our journey. If, on the off chance, we have forgotten our journal, we are hard pressed to even come up with a correct timeline for the things we’ve seen and the food we’ve eaten on a trip, even just a few weeks later. Travel Essentials carries both hard-bound Moleskines in sizes small and large, as well as the Cahiers style, which are soft-sided, heavy-duty cardboard covered journals. I’m a fan of the Cahiers, because although there are less pages, they come in a three pack, and I never fill up one Cahiers on a single trip anyway. Both styles and sizes are available with ruled or un-ruled pages. No matter your preference, these journals (from $9.95-$19.95) are compact and classic, and great for travelers, journalers, and artists.

Baggallini Any Day Tote
The Any Day Tote from Baggallini is both convenient and fashionable. This carry-on compliant bag features all the advanced interior organization, multifunctional pockets, and features that you’ve come to expect from Baggallini - a quick access phone pocket, a cross body strap, a sleeve to go over the handle of your rolling luggage, and my favorite feature, an exterior zippered pocket that perfectly fits your quart size liquids bag for easy access when going through airport security. The Any Day Tote ($118) also comes with a removable RFID phone wristlet, with room for three credit cards and a phone. This is a great, new style from Baggallini that will certainly be around for years to come.

Baseball Travel Books
It’s baseball season, and what better way to celebrate our national pastime, than with a trip to one (or all!) of Major League Baseball’s famous parks. We’ve got several great travel guides for the baseball lover, or for the significant other of the baseball lover who has to go along and visit as many historical baseball destinations as he or she can to maintain a happy marriage. One of our all time favorites is 101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out ($24.95). Its got a great title for sure, and it profiles baseball museums, shrines, sports bars and stadiums across the country. Another fan favorite (see what I did there?) is the Ultimate Baseball Road Trip Book ($24.95), which includes critical info like the best and worst seats in each stadium, folklore and statistics on each park, and more. Finally, we’d also recommend I Don’t Care if We Never Get Back ($16), a book about two buddies who decide to visit each of the 30 Major League parks in 30 days, and still manage to remain friends at the end of their crazy adventure. Each of these titles is a great choice, either for inspiration and information on making your own baseball pilgrimage, or to simply enjoy on a warm summer afternoon on the back deck with a ballgame on the radio.

Eagle Creek Migrate Duffel
With its new Migrate Duffel Collection, Eagle Creek has yet again raised the bar for ruggedness, packability, and ease of use, all while maintaining a commitment to sustainability. All Migrate Duffels feature a water-resistant coating sourced from the recycled plastics found in discarded automobile windshields. Each can be worn as a backpack, or used as a traditional duffel when its straps are tucked away. With

“I learned quickly that trying to force Country Folk to love The Big City is like telling your gay cousin ‘you just haven’t met the right girl yet.’ ” —TINA FEY

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an easy to pack, wide mouth opening, and heavy duty zippers with reflective, easy-grab zipper pulls, as well as Eagle Creek’s legendary No Matter What Guarantee, a Migrate Duffel will haul your gear easily, whether on your back, checked through at the airport, or strapped to the roof of your car. Available in sizes ranging from a carry-on, 40-liter size ($79), to a 90-liter size ($99), and even a 130-liter wheeled version ($159), Eagle Creek’s Migrate Duffels are a tremendous bang for your gear-hauling buck.

Sink Suds Liquid Laundry Detergent
We’re happy to have individual packets of liquid laundry detergent back in stock! Sink Suds are perfect for travel and are safe for all fabrics including delicates. Simply tear open a packet and add its contents to a sink full of hot or cold water. It’s an easy way to hand wash garments, and won’t cause shrinking, stretching or fading. Sink Suds are both phosphate-free and biodegradable, and can be used on cotton, denim, linen, acrylic, nylon, spandex, rayon, silk, suede, and wool. We offer a Sink Suds kit that also includes a rubber sink stopper for those European hotel sinks that don’t have a stopper of their own ($9.95). With just a single Sink Suds packet, a sink stopper, and our braided Latex Clothes Line ($8.95), hotel room clothing care is a snap.

DreamSack Sleep Sack
Yala Designs has long been providing travelers with attractive clothing that is made from wrinkle-free and easy care Bamboo. But a couple of decades ago they got their start making Dreamsacks, their comfy and cozy, 100% silk, travel sleep sacks. The DreamSack is basically a super-light sleeping bag made from top-quality Asian silk that works wondrously with your body’s core temperature to warm you up when it’s cold and cool you down when it’s hot. It also ensures that you’re sleeping on clean bedding no matter where you might lay your head. Which is nice.

DreamSacks pack down to the size of a pair of socks, but open up to a 34” ($118) or 42” ($128) wide and 7’9” long sack. With an easy access side opening and a built-in pillow case, DreamSacks are great for hostels, camping, adventuring, or for anyone who likes to bring a little luxury along on a trip. Yala also offers the perfect companion to the DreamSack with their Silk Eyeshade ($21.95). It’s made from the same sumptuous silk, feels every bit as luxurious, and will caress your eyelids while blocking out unwanted light. Sweet dreams indeed!

Patagonia Lightweight Travel Tote Pack
Another great new product we now offer from Patagonia is their versatile Travel Tote Pack ($79). Whether carried by hand, slung over a shoulder, or worn back-pack-style, this lightweight, stuffable, yet durable travel companion is very handy. It’s made from a supple, featherweight fabric that easily stuffs away into its own pocket for compact storage and boasts a main compartment that features a generous zipper opening for fumble-free access, a handy internal zip pocket for valuables, and a key keeper. An external zippered pocket holds everything you’d want to have close at hand. Backpack-convertible shoulder straps can tuck away when not in use and water bottle pockets help keep refreshing beverages (or a couple of baguettes!) at the ready.

“If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It’s lethal.” — PAULO COELHO
25 Years Gone & We’re Still Truckin On…

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good life on the road, with its slower pace and flexible schedule, the prospect of Bay Area traffic and jobs that would require stuffing ourselves into business clothes, we sought more of the same.

We’d been “home” in the East Bay for a few weeks, contemplating all this, when we were reminded of a cute little travel books, maps and accessories shop we’d come across in Eureka, California. Wistfully we thought “Wouldn’t that be a fun type of shop to run? And wouldn’t Ashland, Oregon be the perfect spot to do it?” And that was it. That was the extent of our market research.

But we would need partners. So we approached my parents. Amazingly they too had recently come across a travel shop and they too had thought that Ashland would be a great spot for one. So doubly, and despite our lack of experience (retail or life), our lack of a business plan, and our lack of any market research, they said yes.

But in some ways it made sense. Travel and the travel biz ran in our families. Nancy caught the bug from her parents. Her Mom is from a little town outside of Dubrovnik, Croatia, and from an early age she would regularly visit the old country. And not only did they visit family, they also spent several weeks touring Europe. With backpacks strapped on, they stayed in hostels, ate lots of fresh bread and yummy cheese, and met travelers from all over the world - pretty brave for a 16-year-old. I also caught it from my parents, who got it from my Great Uncle John. He had spent time in Europe in World War II and had returned a few times since. In the early 70’s he talked my folks into joining him for a trip to France. Of course they were hooked and began to return regularly. And that led in the mid 80’s to my Dad and his brother Tom founding Gemütlichkeit, the Travel Newsletter for Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Our business idea came to us in the fall of 1993, and soon we were on our way to Ashland to see if there were any retail spaces available. There was just one, in the old Anderson Drug space. It wasn’t perfect. It was larger and more costly than we wanted. But it was our only choice. If we wanted to do it, it was time to put up or shut up. Now on our honeymoon, I had grown a goatee that Nancy said she was quite fond of. If we didn’t put up, I’d have to look for a real job, which would surely require me to shave my newfound source of wifely attraction. My vote was to put up. And although I am certain none of my partners considered my goatee in their decision, they also voted yes, and we signed a lease. Wow.

We opened our doors just a few months later on one of those beautiful winter days that Ashland gets a few times a year. It was Friday, February 4th, 1994. The sun was shining and, if I remember correctly, it made it well into the mid 60’s by early afternoon. We had our front door propped open. How, I don’t recall, but we must have had the foresight to purchase a doorstop in the hectic lead up to opening day. We took in a whopping $68.84 that day, a little bit more the next, and an extremely discouraging $3.95 on the Sunday. From humble beginnings…….

In the 25 years since, we’ve had a tremendous amount of good fortune. We’ve developed some traditions — for example, our daughters Emily and Sarah work the shop with us every Christmas Eve — and we’ve been able to help out our community, our favorite example being our luggage donation program for Jackson County Foster Care. Sure there have been some downs. But the ups far outweigh those downs. It ain’t even close.

An unintended perk of our biz is that when folks walk through our front door they tend to fit into three categories: (1) they have a trip planned that they are excited about, (2) they are reminded of past trips, or (3) they quickly become fascinated with possibilities of visiting distant lands. And each of those scenarios tends to have a wonderfully positive effect on us, on our staff, and on other customers.

Make no mistake, our endeavor only works because of the adventuresome spirit of our customers. If you folks didn’t want to sample street tacos in Mexico City, tramp around New Zealand, or explore ancient sites like Angkor Wat and Petra, we wouldn’t be here today. We owe our existence to your spirit of adventure and wanderlust. Thank you.

On a whim, we moved to Ashland, opened our shop, made some friends, had a lot of fun, did some traveling, had a couple of fabulous kids, enjoyed the highs, and soldiered through the lows, kept our noses to the grindstone, and one morning we woke up and, quick as a snap of your fingers, 25 years had gone by. And I’m still rocking the goatee. Thanks again.

"One wonderful result of our adventure was the realization that gaining knowledge of the world is the true fountain of youth." — ROSANNE KNORR, THE GROWN UPS GUIDE TO RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME
Are Discount Airlines Worth the “Cheaper” Fare

by Nancy Bestor

On a trip to Los Angeles earlier this year, I booked a “basic economy” ticket with United Airlines. Basic economy is a newer fare offering that has become available from several airlines in the last year or so. With Delta, American, Alaska, and United, if you are willing to give up a few “amenities,” you’ll get a seat that is theoretically cheaper than a standard economy seat. My airfare for this trip to LA, for example, was $43 cheaper than the next lowest price ticket I could find. My basic economy ticket was not without its hassles, however. By the end of the trip, I wished I had paid the additional $43 for a standard economy ticket. This got me to thinking about whether discounted airline tickets, and even discount airlines—like Allegiant, Spirit, and Jet Blue—really save travelers money, and, if they do, whether or not it’s really worth it. Here are my observations.

With their basic economy fare, United restricts passengers to one under the seat bag, measuring no larger than 17 x 10 x 9 inches. That is the only bag you’re allowed to carry on. Any other suitcases must be checked, for the checked bag fee of $30. If you’re wondering whether or not United policies that policy, I’m here to tell you they do. On my flight, the gate agent repeatedly stopped passengers with basic economy tickets who had more than one bag—and remember that a purse counts as a bag here—or a bag that was larger than the measurements listed above. The agent was watching like a hawk too. Not only did travelers with the over-sized bags, or more than one bag, have to pay the checked bag fee, once they were pulled aside, they also had to pay an additional $25 “gate service” fee, or as I’ve been known to call it, the “you broke the rules fee.” My small carry on, the Baggallini Avenue Tote, was stuffed to the gills. I couldn’t have done it if I hadn’t been heading somewhere warm, where I wouldn’t need any bulky clothing, for only three days. I still wore two sweaters onto the plane to save space. If I had needed a jacket, I would have worn that too.

With a basic economy ticket, United requires you to wait in line and check in at the airport. You cannot check in online ahead of time, and you cannot print your boarding pass at home. Heck, you can’t even check in at an airport kiosk unless there is a United agent nearby to oversee and approve the check in. This is so United can catch you and charge you if you do not have the correct carry-on sized bag. You also do not get to pick a seat in advance—which in my case meant I was in the last row, next to the bathrooms—you board last, and I do mean last, you cannot change or cancel your ticket, you cannot upgrade, and with some airlines, you do not earn mileage credit. Airlines other than United have less restrictions on their basic economy tickets, but there are still many inconveniences, which led me to believe that my savings of $43 was not really worth it. Are other discount airlines worth it? Don’t answer yet, as there are a few more things to consider.

Discount airlines often fly a limited schedule to and from some destinations. Take Allegiant for example. Allegiant flies out of Medford, Oregon to Phoenix, Arizona twice a week. When my daughter Sarah and I were waiting for an Allegiant flight in LA a few years ago, our flight was delayed due to mechanical issues. We were told by Allegiant that if the flight was cancelled, we would have to wait to get home until the next scheduled flight, which was two days later. Allegiant did not have other planes that could make this trip, and it appears they also don’t have relationships with other carriers that could help get a traveler to their destination. Our flight was not cancelled, thankfully, just delayed. Allegiant’s “contract of carriage” states that they are not liable for weather, acts of God, strikes, and mechanical issues, among other things. You can certainly get a refund if a flight is cancelled, but a refund doesn’t help you get to your destination does it?

Discount airlines also offer limited carry-on options. Some (Allegiant being one) require you to pay for a carry-on that goes in the overhead bin ($20). Allegiant also charges travellers who wish to choose a seat (up to $75), for priority boarding ($4-12), for printing a boarding pass at the airport ($5), and, last but not least, Allegiant charges for food and water in flight ($2-12). Yes, Allegiant charges for water.

Another one of my beefs with discount airlines is that it can be very difficult to get helped by customer service ahead of a flight. I called Allegiant on two different occasions and each time waited over an hour on the phone before getting connected to a customer service agent. And of course, after those long waits, they were unable to help me, and instead directed me to the Allegiant desk at the airport, but only on days Allegiant was flying of course. Another time we had booked discount tickets to Myanmar with Indian Eagle, a discount international airline. Unfortunately, we had to cancel this trip, and Indian Eagle’s customer service once again took forever, and was then almost impossibly difficult to work with.

So the question this leaves me with is are discount airlines, and basic economy fares with mainstream airlines, worth it? My answer is that I don’t think so. Perhaps when I was 25 and every dollar I earned was closely monitored, I would have answered differently. When I was 25, I would take a red eye flight without thinking twice just to save a few bucks. I’d book myself to Europe with three or four stops along the way if it meant I could score a cheaper ticket. Now that I’m 52, I pay closer attention to things like how many stops a ticket has, how early the flight is leaving, and how late it is arriving. And, although it pains me to admit it, I might be ready to say goodbye to discount tickets and discount airlines, because I’m a little more particular in my 50s than I was in my 20s. I really don’t want to be nickedel and dinned by an airline, or have to limit myself to a bag that won’t fit under the seat. And if I have a problem, I want good customer service. If I have to pay more to get it then so be it. I’m 52 years old, and I’m worth it.
Gastronomic Adventures in French Cuisine...

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Petit Pontoise took great care of us with an exceptional dining experience powered by locally sourced ingredients. But our finest Parisian repast did not come from the aforementioned books. It was instead a recommendation from a friend of a friend, who had recently been to Paris and came back raving about Chez Janou. After a quick scan of online reviews, we put it on our list.

Now the previously mentioned restaurants all offered online reservations and it was quite easy for this non-French speaker to claim a table. But, while Chez Janou has an informative website, they do not offer online booking. To be sure to secure a table, I’d need to call the restaurant. On my first attempt I chose a bad time. I called at 8pm Paris time on a Wednesday and was asked to call another time, as the restaurant was too busy at the moment to take my reservation. The gentleman I spoke to was rushed but polite, and I would guess that if he hadn’t had to contend with my language shortcomings he’d have helped me then and there. In his defense, the din that I heard coming from the restaurant would have made detailed communication quite difficult. So I called back the next day at 4pm Paris time (5am PST!), and easily made a reservation.

And so our first night, after powering through considerable jet lag compounded by some epic flight delays resulting in a night spent in Denver, found us dragging ourselves to Chez Janou. And soon, after a bit of confusion regarding our reservation (it was under the name “Rabbit”!), this crowded, boisterous and smoke-free restaurant, and a refreshing glass of Kir Royale to start, perked us right up.

Our waitress was delightful. She was enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and spoke plenty of English for our dining needs. She answered our questions and guided us through the menu with no pretension, no brusqueness, no exasperation and no eye rolling. One cliché down.

First it was mussels with pesto for Nancy and a crawfish salad with avocado and grapefruit. Both were perfect. Nancy had boar stew and I chose a pork chop confit with prunes for our main dishes. We followed that with some goat cheese and honey, and for dessert Chez Janou’s chocolate mousse. Everything was pretty much perfect and the mousse capped off the night in style. It is served in a huge terrine and you are encouraged to plop as much as you’d like onto your plate. And it came with a complementary shot of Joseph Cartron Melon Liqueur. An excellent and generous end to a great dining experience. With a ½ carafe of house red wine, the bill was 121 euros.

Our plane tickets had us returning to Paris for one last night before flying home, and we decided that Chez Janou would be the perfect spot for the last night of our trip. Once again, on a Tuesday night at 9pm, the place was packed. And once more, we had a helpful and attentive waiter and great meal. Mussels again for Nancy and a delectable fish stew for me. Then it was osso buco and risotto with scallops. We skipped the cheese this time and went straight to the mousse and melon liqueur. This time the bottle was getting low (but not that low!) and our waiter simply left it at the table for us finish. It was another exciting, informal, perfectly paced, and fabulously delicious dining experience.

And I’m happy to admit it was every bit as good as our neighborhood taco joint. There may be hope for me yet.