

B9 ON BEING TOURISTS IN PARIS

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B9 ON BEING TOURISTS IN PARIS SCRIPT

DATE: 6 JUNE 2011

Sunday was the day we chose to be tourists; map carrying, gawky, cross walk stumbling tourists lost on beautiful grand boulevards.



Even though we knew Paris quite well at one time, street names and bus routes completely slipped out of our travel tips bag of memories and we were reduced to asking complete strangers how to get somewhere. In most cases they were from the U.S. and in Paris for the first time so were absolutely no help.



Choosing the right metro stop helps a lot, so when we surfaced from underground we faced the famous twin bell towers of Notre Dame cathedral. Even if you've been there a hundred times it's still impossible to resist taking a picture of the church and bookstalls along the Seine.

In choosing a complete stranger to take our picture I always check two things. First; Is his camera equal to or better than mine? If it's equal or better, he probably won't take my camera because he's already chosen between Canon and Nikon. The second; Can he can out run me? Unfortunately, these days I can't outrun many people so the first sizing up carries a lot of weight.



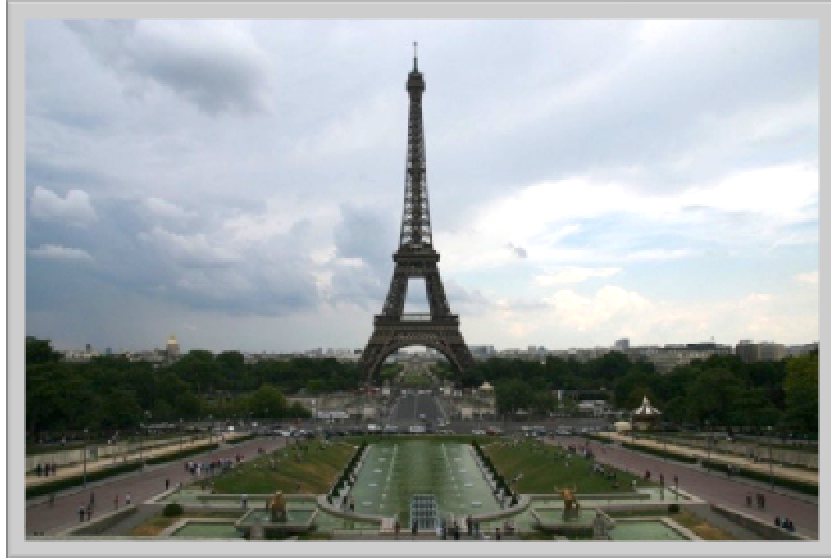
I got lucky with my choice. He was a Norwegian instructor of photography and video techniques. I knew he was special when he dropped to his knee to frame our shot properly. We struck up a quasi-professional conversation and would probably still be swapping stories if our wives hadn't broken it up. Oh, yes. He was a Nikon man.



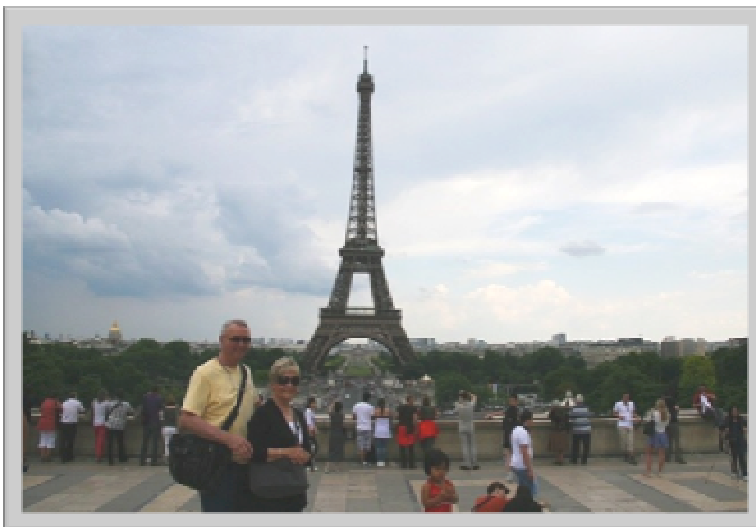
We walked to the rear of Notre Dame to see the famous photo angle up close and were surprised to find a beautiful little garden and a highly detailed view of the architecture of this famous building. I took a chance on a lesser camera owner and found he was from Columbus, Ohio. My selection process does count a lot on whether they look like they're from the States or not. Being from the Midwest counts even more.



We began what Louise describes as a forced march from Notre Dame. We crossed the Seine toward the Hotel de Ville or city hall. There was a big crowd seated in front of the ornate building. The crowd was absolutely silent until, suddenly, it would explode in cheers and applause and then, mysteriously, would fall silent again. Turns out they were watching a jumbotron screen of the French tennis open between Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. Since neither is French the crowd was completely bipartisan but enthused nonetheless.



We hopped the bus that runs along the Seine and drops you off at the Eiffel Tower. There are electronic signs in the bus that not only signal the next stop bus also warn against pick-pockets. It was a warm day and the bus was very crowded. A man, with a sport coat folded over his arm, sidled up to me and began eyeing my camera bag and wallet pocket. I became a little paranoid and crossed my arms over my bag and caressed my wallet, probably leading him to the hidden treasures. The bus lurched to a stop at the Eiffel Tower and the man bumped into me several times causing a reflex that could almost be described as spastic. Probably alarmed by my seizure-like gestures, he elected not to follow us off the bus.

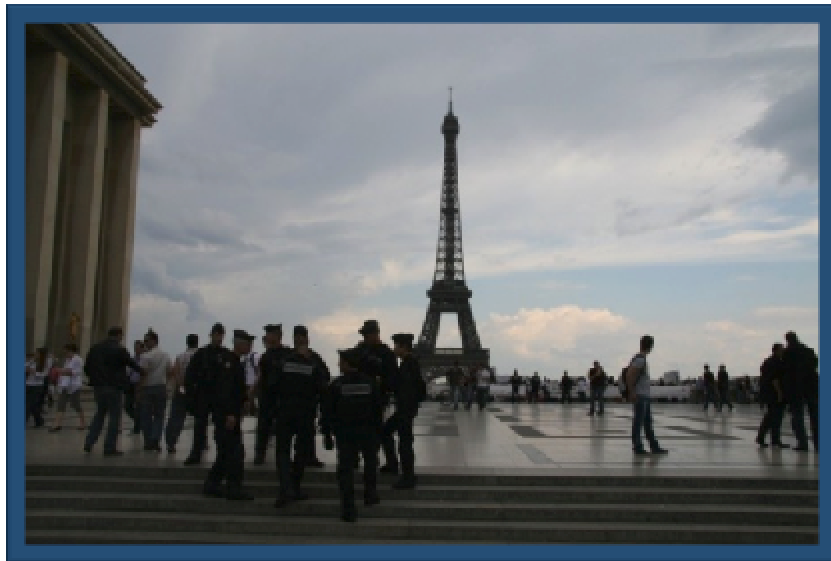


We climbed the long, long steps to the Palais de Chaillot where you get a grand overview of the Tour Eiffel and beyond. We wanted the stereotypical photo of us with the tower behind but my qualification plan was coming apart. Everyone around us was from the orient or the middle-east and they were moving so fast it was hard to evaluate the

quality of their cameras. There was confusion because a planned demonstration pro Syria was taking place while a counter demonstration was at full tilt a short distance away. I finally chose an elderly man who I felt I could outrun. Fortunately, I wasn't put to the test and Photoshop took care of the tilt in his picture.



Suddenly a swarm of dark blue vans pulled up and out poured a squad of gendarmes who quickly formed a cordon and swept us all away to the sides and then stood there daring anyone to move. I figured it couldn't be too bad since they were wearing soft caps instead of hard helmets and were keeping their truncheons on their waists instead in their hands but I wasn't about to test their self-imposed restraint.



I felt a hard pinch in my back and turned to see Louise gesturing\*. "There's a metro stop right over there," she said pointing furtively. "I'm bored" she said, looking more frightened than bored. "Let's go home."

And so we did. a bientot from Paris.

Louise and Ray