

B10 STROLLING TO AND THROUGH THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS**PROJECT: EUROPE 2011****SUBJECT: B10 STROLLING TO AND THROUGH THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS****DATE: 8 JUNE 2011**

The day dawned overcast with small patches of blue poking through. "There's almost enough to make a pair of man's pants," Louise observed, which is her way of saying it's going to be a nice day. It rained during the night meaning all nature's things would be refreshed and in bloom, except us. Seemed like a perfect idea to walk to, and through, the Luxembourg Gardens - just a short distance from our daughter's home. I checked with the Maps software in the iPad and it promised a brief but brisk walk of 2.8 kilometers, barely 1.6 miles. Off we went.



The designated path took us right through the Montparnasse district and past the Montparnasse Tower, the highest skyscraper in Paris. It sits atop a major metro terminal where you can hop on underground trains headed for anywhere. The tower is accused, with good reason, of spoiling the photo shots of the Eiffel Tower and other historic landmarks. In a reasonably flat city, it just leaps from the ground and sticks out.



We walked on narrow sidewalks, past small shops of every stripe and dodged the traffic on the city's narrow one-way streets.

It seemed you could buy just about anything you wanted behind the glass windows and gaudy signs.

While Louise checked out the latest fashions, looking for anything in petite,





I scanned the shops that sold practical things...



like airplane models made of real metal and world globes that could stand by your favorite reading chair, providing tactile information in case you were too lazy to Google it.



As we went deeper into the city we noticed the neighborhood changed tenor somewhat as the Mephisto and beauty aid shops gave way to clear and open raw sex.



There was everything but nude women in the windows.

Since this was near noon, I wouldn't bet against the latter much later in the day.



We cruised by kabob shops, Greek delis and bakeries with smells out of this world, trying not to be tempted because we'd only just had breakfast. The sign that broke our resolve was, of all things, a Subway sandwich shop. We walked past and then turned to head back when Louise spotted a tiny shop that sold fresh baked pastries and the sandwich jambon, The ham and cheese combo on fresh French bread took us back to the time when that was our only travel food. Nutritious and cheap was our standard then and hasn't changed much in over fifty years.



We were only a block from the Luxembourg Gardens, a well-cared for wooded area with gravel walkways



that lead to an impressive chateau built by Marie di Medici sometime in the 1300's.



She was lonesome for her native Italy so had a chateau styled after one of her favorite buildings in Florence with showcase gardens to match.



Today it belongs to the people who swarm in just to get a little peace and quiet in a city that never seems to calm down.



We chose a quiet spot to enjoy our jambon and fromage sandwiches, topped off with a chocolate chip cookie. The moment was much too perfect to go unchronicled so I lowered my qualifications and stopped two girls who looked like they spoke English and could stay in focus. Bingo...even though I had to waive the "can I outrun them?" policy one more time. I'm beginning to live on the edge out here.



After an afternoon of scenery gazing in the sun it was time to head home. By then Louise and I decided the quiet neighborhood stroll had worn thin. We had rediscovered the real charm of Paris; the smells from the stores, the sound of motor scooters scooting past, the "bee paw, bee paw" of emergency vehicles and the ever-present whiff of diesel exhaust that seems to hang over the city. These are the things we remember most about Paris and, thankfully, they haven't changed one bit.



One thing different we have noticed is the courtesy shown to older people on public transportation. As we entered an overcrowded car in the Metro, a middle-aged couple immediately leapt to their feet and offered us their seats. "Do we look that old?" I asked in halting French. "Non," they said. "Just older than us."



Best of all, we had a front row seat to the on-board entertainment
Once again, bonne nuit from Paris