

**B17 THE FRENCH B&B EXPERIENCE**

PROJECT: EUROPE 2011

SUBJECT: B17 THE FRENCH B&amp;B EXPERIENCE SCRIPT

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Before we started this trip, and after reviewing our finances for it, the decision was made to contain expenses where we could...primarily in nightly housing. B&B's seemed to be the answer but which to choose? We asked our daughter, Chrise, to give us a hand in finding those cute but inexpensive hideaways in the French countryside. We impressed on her the need to control expenses and she said, "If you want to go cheap you've got to expect cheap." Reacting to her pointed but accurate comment, we said that we had only a few conditions beside the cost. One was free but secure accommodations for the MG and the other was availability of WiFi. With those guidelines she and her newest friend, booking.com, headed for the internet.

Our Chrise was a dynamo. E-mailed bookings started rolling in with prices attached that were affordable if not cheap. Besides meeting our requirements they all had one thing in common...distance from an urban environment. Since we live in a big city we felt this would be a nice change. It turns out her search resulted in some very pleasing experiences. We want to share some of those with you.



**La Thiaumerie**

We took the train to Le Havre to redeem our MG but our expeditor, Jeroen Walda of Trans Global Enterprises, said it wouldn't be ready until the next day. We rented a car and drove to La Thiaumerie B&B in St. Louet sur Vire in the Normandy area.



Because of the distance from Le Havre, we arrived late. Sally and Michael Byrne greeted us and asked if we'd eaten. On hearing "No," Sally launched into making sandwiches while Michael poured the wine. Don't know which was the most welcome.

Afterward we sat and chatted in their warm and welcoming sitting area. Michael quit his job as a software engineer career with Xerox and Sally left her nursing position in their mid 40's to live their dream of owning a B&B in France. They rescued an old farm house and gradually re-made it into a clean and comfortable getaway conveniently close to the Normandy beaches of WWII fame.



They still have a soft spot in their hearts for their home country though. Michael has created a typical English pub in an outbuilding and when he gets homesick he has a place to go. They have four extremely clean guest rooms. Not overly spacious but still a great place for a good night's sleep under feather blankets. WiFi is available but not in the rooms. Michael displayed a great interest in the iPad2

so I gave him a complete tour. It took several glasses of wine but even learned a few things myself. Breakfast was typically French with juices, jams, croissants and other breakfast breads and plenty of coffee or tea. We were sorry to leave them but recommend that you take our place whenever you can.



We picked up the MG in Le Havre the next day and immediately jumped on their freeway system to take us to Le Mans for the running of the 24 hour race. In this case, "freeway" is a misnomer. It was a distance of 150 miles and cost us 19 Euros (\$27.00) plus change. "Peage" means toll road and is a word we look for now before going on just any road.



### **Le Tertre**

After many futile discussions with our GPS lady, we finally found Le Tertre in the countryside near the village of Malicorne, just 16 miles south of the Le Mans track. Our hostess was Corinne Kalker-Gerson who, over many years, has converted the outbuildings of an old French farm into charming and spacious accommodations for the tired traveler. The bed was large, comfortable and covered with a fluffy feather blanket. Louise insists on calling it a duvet so take your pick. The bathrooms are modern and, unlike many B&B's, supplies washcloths.



Corinne also serves a typical French country breakfast of croissants, bread, jams and coffee or tea. On beautiful days you have your option of eating out doors



or you can have your breakfast served in the common room outside your room surrounded by modern appliances and antique furniture. WiFi was not available in our room but she allowed us to use her home to access e-mail and the internet. Another emotional goodbye. How many of these can we stand?

Our next stop, and most unusual accommodation, was in the small town of Sevres, a few miles east of Blois. We saw the sign advertising the Chateau Laloin, Hotel La Colonial and drove through large iron gates. At the end of a long gravel driveway was a large chateau typical of an older, grander time in the Loire Valley. Today it is operated as a twenty-room hotel.



**Chateau Laloin, Hotel La Colonial**



We pulled up in front of this impressive building and had no problem with finding parking. A young man named Charly bounded out the front door, grabbed our overweight bags and led us to our room on the second floor.

Once unpacked, I set out to explore this example of a grand period in French history. First thing I noticed was there were no human noises. As I moved from room to room they were all the same... vacant.



Expecting to hear pool balls cracking in the billiards room, I didn't. The pool cues were stacked neatly in the corner with no one using them.



The bar was occupied by one person, Charly, who waited patiently for me to order a drink. I asked for a beer.



Out of curiosity, I and extremely clean. No chefs, no even pots and pans. I went to the lounge and quietly almost afraid to make any noise that



went in the large kitchen. Nothing. dishwashers, not I went to the empty sipped my beer, make any noise that



Finally I went to Charly, the only person at the reception desk, and asked when his other guests would arrive. "Tomorrow," he said. "Yesterday we were completely full. Tomorrow we will be completely full." "What about today?" I asked. "You're it," he said. "Just you two. How do you like your eggs cooked for breakfast?" In effect, he was our personal valet.



That night we imagined we heard children's voices and small footsteps running down the hallway. It was spooky. Next morning Charly appeared with our full breakfast: Sausage, eggs sunny-side-up, croissants, fruit juice, jellies and jams, cheeses and coffee or tea. He explained the children's noises by introducing his wife and young son who were in the kitchen. Afterward he and a brother, who materialized out of nowhere, made temporary repairs to the MG luggage rack with nuts and bolts. Once finished, the brother disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared but our luggage problems were solved.



Charly explained that theirs was a sort of affinity hotel that catered to groups needing enough room for training, conferences and meetings. A business group had been in the day before and the following day there would be a wedding party in until the weekend. We just happened to hit a bye day. Sure enough, people began to trickle in as we were loading the MG. Even though we understood it was still spooky. We drove away laughing about the experience of a whole chateau just for us and headed for our next night in Amboise, only 30 miles away.

Louise and Ray