

Dear Friends and Family,

Cultural richness, diversity, confusion among continents? The world is at our doorstep.....

I am finally sitting down to write while in the train from Marrakech to Rabat in Morocco. After spending almost four months based in Paris (the longest continuous stretch since 2003) with three overnight trips away (the gastronomic delight of Dijon, the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach Normandy, including a visit to Bayeux and its famous tapestry, and Vaxholm, reached by short ferry ride out of Stockholm, Sweden), I returned to northern India for two weeks and then “home” to Agadir in early October. So many cultural encounters in a short time period.

When based in Paris in the summer my days were very full – divided among day-long hikes in the beautiful French countryside surrounding Paris (Ile de France), five rhythms dance (a practice created by Gabrielle Roth in the USA which I first practiced in Chicago), foreign films – this summer several notable ones of Iranian and Polish origin, and museum exhibitions particularly three featuring sculptures of Angola, Mali, and Voodoo (Benin/Togo), as well as avant-garde photography (Santu Mofokeng – South Africa, Claude Cahun – France, Robert Mapplethorpe – USA, and Patrick Tosani – France). I also joined The American Library in Paris so am reading avidly from their collection and attending their many outstanding evening programs – especially evenings with an author.

However, I find myself increasingly drawn by India, a country as “disorderly” as France is “orderly” – but in a totally captivating way! On this trip I was particularly taken by the bright colors – red, orange, fuschia – of the women’s saris and men’s turbans in the fields and deserts of Rajasthan.



Re-visits of the Taj Mahal, the fort and palace of Fatehpur Sikri and the Amber Fort/Palace of Jaipur further re-enforced the memories of the beauty, especially the artisan workmanship, of these monuments.

En route from Agra to Jaipur we stopped at an amazing 8<sup>th</sup> Century 11-storey deep step well used for dry season water supply and ritual bathing adjacent to a Hindu temple substantially



dedicated to human fertility.

The cities of Jodhpur and Udaipur in Rajasthan were very distinctive. Jodhpur is dominated by a hilltop fort containing many beautiful palaces. We stayed in the nicely restored Pal Haveli, right off the central clock tower square, with terraces overlooking the fort above and the tank below. Between Jodhpur and Udaipur I finally got to visit a Jain temple and it is truly beautiful – very simple and ornate at the same time with its carvings in white marble. Even with many tourists present I felt a beautiful harmony and tranquility.

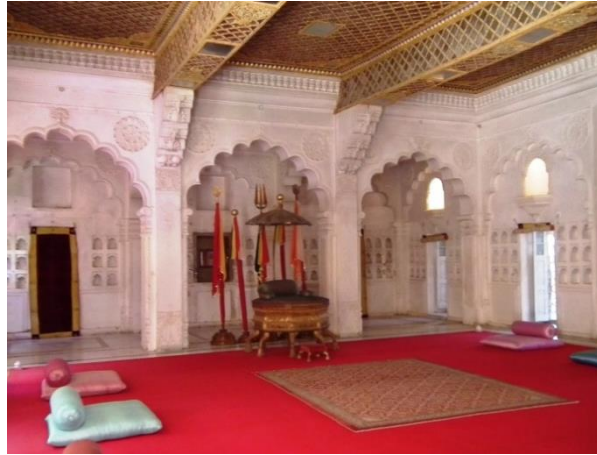


Jodhpur is known as the blue city, due to the color of many buildings, which is apparent when viewed from the fort above. Udaipur, by contrast, sits on a series of lakes. Two islands are completely covered by palaces, one now the exclusive Hotel Lake Palace whose restaurants are not even open to non-guests. The other, Jagmandir Island, guarded by beautiful life-size stone elephants, is open and a lovely respite from the narrow winding lanes in town.





As along the rivers, the lakes are also used for laundering, bathing and swimming. The City Palace is really a series of palaces created beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> C with beautifully restored



rooms of Rajput and Mughal architecture. In addition to these monuments, I realize I am in India, land of the people I love!



On my visit to Rabat I want to focus on its historic architecture. Although I have previously visited its highlights, that was prior to travel in the Mughal and Turkish Empires and so I didn't have any context for Rabat's walls, gates and towers dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> C.

Now, more about Ile de France. It is hard for Americans to picture that there is an enormous, fully mapped and maintained network of public trails throughout France. One rarely

encounters fences in the countryside and the streams, canals and rivers in Ile de France also contribute many excellent walks. Within a half hour train ride in any direction from central Paris one is happily ambling in rural, peaceful, countryside. One feels as if one is part of an Impressionist painting!

I walk with two French groups whose volunteer leaders plan the day's itinerary including origin and destination trains and times. Pack a lunch, a water bottle, sunscreen, cap, rain poncho and don hiking boots and off you go. I usually opt for 15-20 km and mostly flat, but there are shorter as well as more aggressive walks available, virtually daily.



Then there are the nearby medieval towns of Provins, Dourdan and Moret Sur Loing (among others) with their preserved fortifications and museums, as well as nearby chateaux to explore (Champs-sur-Marne, Rentilly, Chamarand and Reuil-Malmaison are a few visited this summer).

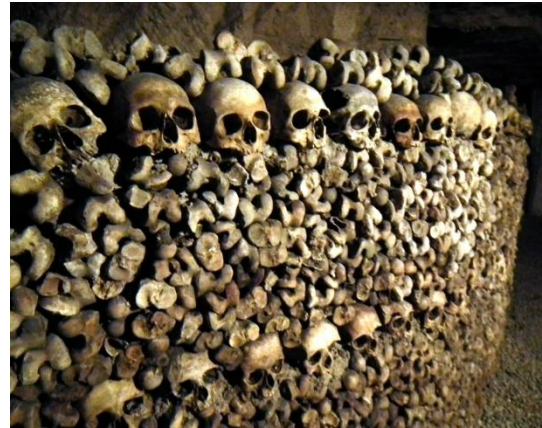


Closer to home on Montmartre is the wall "I Love You" written in almost every language of the world, tromp d'oeil painting and Saint Serg Russian Orthodox Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrdt (currently under restoration).





The Catacombs, in the 14<sup>th</sup>, now open to the public, are in former quarries where the remains of six million Parisians were relocated and re-consecrated from parish cemeteries between the late 18<sup>th</sup> C and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> C.



I am now on the return train/bus ride Rabat/Marrakech/Agadir. I really enjoyed re-visiting Rabat, especially easy to get around now with the tramway system.

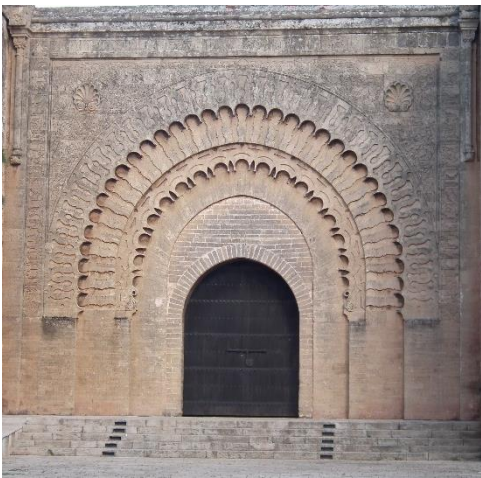
I had forgotten the beauty of the mausoleum of King Mohammed V which rivaled that of tombs I



had now seen elsewhere.  
I also newly appreciated  
tour Hassan (never



the elegance of Bab Boureh and  
completed), both 12<sup>th</sup> C.



The riverfront has changed a lot with new marinas, and bridges have replaced the former  
shuttle boats across to Sale. But you can still overlook it taking tea at the Ouadayah.







I don't think I had ever visited the ocean beach and lighthouse before. The man dressed in white was celebrating Eid al Adhar (Eid Kebir), the most important Muslim holiday in Morocco.



Eid Kebir is when a sheep is sacrificed in recollection of the willingness by Abraham to sacrifice his only son as commanded by God. This also marks the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

In Rabat it was interesting to note that each neighborhood had organized a fire pit where people brought the sheep heads and feet for roasting (similar to the concept of neighborhood



ovens for bread baking still in use here). On the first day people eat the organ meats and only on later days is the sheep sectioned and 1/3 given to the poor, 1/3 to friends. As we chatted with the men providing the

roasting service we received three invitations to join their families to partake of the feast. These were genuine examples of the famous Moroccan hospitality.

So, my friends, that brings you up to date! My next planned trips are to Ethiopia followed by Egypt and Jordan (postponed from last year). I wish to each of you and your loved ones a blessed rest of 2011 and the best for the year ahead. Love and Peace *Marilee*

This beautiful rainbow on the way home seemed to symbolize the peacefulness of all of these travels.

