

POTPOURRI OF FIVE SHORT VISITS 2026

This year in addition to the trips to the USA, Spain and the Rhone River pilgrimage, I took several short “local” trips.

In April Eurostar took me to London to meet up with a friend currently working in Ghana who had a four-day Easter weekend. I stayed at the Standard across from Pancras Station in one of their well vegetated interior rooms. Their restaurant Decima is beautifully decorated with an upscale Mexican menu. Delicious.

I spent a day at the British Museum. The exhibition Hawaii was fascinating. I thought I knew its history pretty well, but had no idea that King Liholiho and Queen Kamāmalu died of measles on a visit to King George IV in Britain in July 1824. They were to be



negotiating a friendship agreement. In 1843 Britain and France formally recognized Hawaii as an independent nation. Hawaii joined the US as its 50th state in 1959. This is a sample of ceremonial robes of the era.

When museums have African exhibits, I always gravitate to them as was the case this visit. There was a whole wall of Benin (Nigeria) bronze plaques



like mine and a textile exhibit.

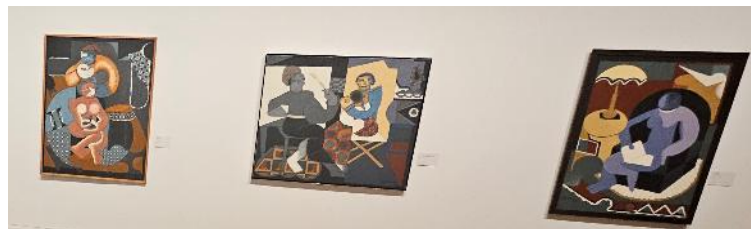


There was also a Ndebele apron whose geometric shapes were reminiscent of my stay there (South Africa) with the women who make the geometric beaded jewelry in the geometric patterned houses.



The current major exhibit was about Samurai. I learned a lot because I only thought of them as warriors, not as both men and women of the highly literate class who led all phases of life.

The next day I met up with my friend at Tate Modern for the Nigerian Modernism 1920's to 1990's exhibit. What a huge treasure of varied styles! A couple of the artists had studied in Paris in a studio about a block from my apartment in what was then known as Batignolles.



We finished the day in time for me to take the last Eurostar back as far as Brussels.

The next way was the wedding of a friend from Peace Corps Benin years. After the ceremony at the Mairie they held a magnificent reception at Chateau Ferme de Moriensart



in Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. The venue was fantastic and we were greeted by chamber music and free flowing hors d'oeuvres and beverages. I reconnected with more



Benin rpcv's and a highlight of the evening was dancing by participants from toddlers to the elderly (me)!



Back at the Warwick Grand Place hotel in Brussels there was a lovely late night view.

Sunday I had time for a bus tour of Brussels where I enjoyed some humor in the midst of impressive buildings and public

spaces.



The second quick visit was to Norway joining my daughter for a reunion with an old friend. We met in 1967 in the apartment building in Bellevue, WA where we had settled with our Boeing engineer husbands and baby daughters. The friendship continued even after they returned to Norway.

They live in Porsgrunn, a city of about 40,000 a two-hour train ride south of Oslo. It is on the Frierfjord where the Porsgrunn river joins it. We started our visit by picking the vegetables for the meals for the next few days and visiting a local artisan bakery.



I enjoyed the contrast between traditional and modern architecture. Here for example, are



the Catholic and Church of Norway buildings.

We spent a special evening of jazz with the Bendik Hofseth Trio. Their sound was unique, a bit on the somber, mournful

side, but

very pleasant listening.

The porcelain factory in Porsgrunn is famous. Founded in 1885 with help from German experts, it initially made toilets and sinks.

However, it migrated to high-quality household vases and tableware. We visited the factory outlet shop where some fun was had with the displays. The traditional straw pattern is still hand painted.



Then we visited the museum which told the history. Here is the factory with some early workers. A principal designer in the 1920's was



Nora Gulbrandsen. This is an entire display case of just her plates.

The family has a second home on South Koster island in Sweden where we also spent a couple of days. Here is part of their view.



This is home to Sweden's Kosterhavets Marine National Park and the interpretive center documents >6000 known marine species in the area.

To get there we took two ferries, the first with the car which we left in Stromstad, Sweden and the second pedestrians only as there are no private cars on south Koster island.



As these waters contain many islands, views of lighthouses were abundant.



We had an excellent dinner at Klapphagen restaurant and enjoyed humorous art when



walking back home.

Fishing is still a principal activity as is just hanging out!



where we enjoyed an excellent free products selection from both



Our return from Stromstad was to Sandefjord, Norway on the impressive super ferry, Color Hybrid. It has a casino, great children's play area, a restaurant lunch, and a huge duty-countries.



The next short trip was to Andorra, finally completing my goal to visit every country in Europe. Unbeknownst to us, September 8 is their National Day dedicated to the Patron Saint Meritxell (a fairly common Catalan female name). Tradition holds that a 12th C statue of the Virgin was repeatedly found under a single rose growing in the snow, so a chapel was built for it. In 1873 she was made the Patron of the Principality of Andorra and in 1921 she was canonized by the Church. Unfortunately, in 1972 the chapel burned down and the statue was destroyed. Here is a picture of the replica that was created.

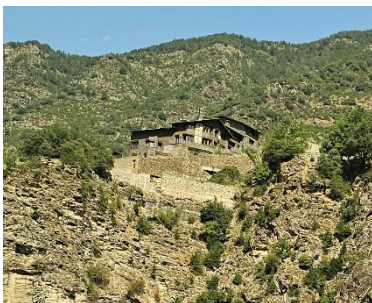


With a friend we based in the capital Andorra la Vella. The country has a permanent population of ~90,000 and covers an area of 181 square miles, about 2 ½ times the size of Washington, DC or 12% the size of Rhode Island.

It is solidly mountainous in the Pyrenees with ski resorts in the winter and hiking, climbing, fishing and golf in the summer. Duty-free shopping attracts visitors all year long. Seven of the 8 million annual visitors come to ski.



The highways and tunnels are amazing engineering feats. Most of the buildings are constructed of the same stone as the surrounding mountains. I was amazed at where some of them were



perched! Only 1.7% of the land is arable, although we did see



a few sheep and cows.



There are a wide variety of food choices available but because it is more Spanish than French, most places were closed on Sunday and virtually everything was closed Tuesday, the holiday. Fortunately, we weren't there to shop! And our hotel had a buffet available at all meal times.

Two principal attractions in the capital are Eglise Saint Stephen and the Seven Poets by Jaume Plensa. These are resin and fiberglass sculptures perched on 30-foot-high poles in front of the national parlement representing the seven Parishes of Andorra. At night they glow in various colors.



Saint Stephens is a beautiful Romanesque Church that was substantially altered and updated in the 20th C.



The President of France and the Bishop of Urgell are co-princes and heads of state. This structure dates back to the Middle Ages.

However, by its constitution adopted in 1993, Andorra is a Sovereign Parliamentary Democracy that retains them, but the directly elected Parliament (General Council) selects the Head of Government. There is no national postal service, both the Spanish and French postal services operate and there is no military. The Euro is the currency although Andorra is not a member of the EU.

The local language is Catalan, and signs are also in Spanish. We did not hear a lot of French spoken but saw many French license plates.

Fortunately, there are elevators located strategically around town to reach the various levels from the river next to the national bus station (our arrival point from the closest train station in France) up to our street. The river flowing through town is crystal clear and there were active fishermen.



On the holiday we took one of the local buses to the end of the line at Ordino for a change of scenery. Fortunately, there was one restaurant open, Cal Tonet, that had one remaining unreserved table for lunch! As everywhere else, the town is immaculate with screening for the garbage/recycling containers. There is a nine-hole par 3 golf course.



The next two short trips were long weekends in France to new destinations for me. Both were to areas celebrating America 250 France-America friendship arising from France's critical involvement the American Revolution.

The first was to Villers-sur-Mer, a town of 2500 permanent population about ten miles west of Deauville/Trouville. The architecture is distinctly Norman! The long sandy beach fronts on the English Channel.



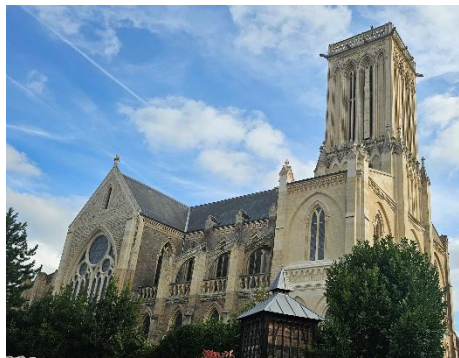
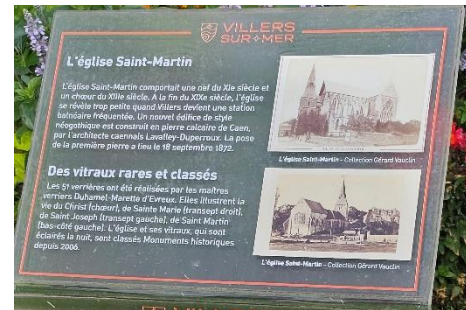
Nearby are cliffs where fossils of Jurassic-era marine plants and animals have been found

which are now in a paleontology museum in town. Hence the placement each summer of a plant-covered dinosaur (and son) in front of the tourist office!



The visit included dedication of a new marker for the neogothic Saint Martin church, constructed in the last quarter of the 19th C, and renowned for its stained-glass windows.

A concert



celebrated Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy who was a close friend of Benjamin Franklin

during his years in France. She composed the March of the



Insurgents celebrating victory at the Battle of Saratoga, the reason for and vocal soloist many of her other

this celebration. The organ/harpsichord concert included not only that piece but compositions.

A recent biography Madame Brillon de Jouy et son Salon (in French) by historian and descendant Christine de Pas includes many excerpts from the correspondence between Mme de Jouy and Franklin. She is buried along with other family members in the local cemetery.

Concert	
Clavier	
La marche des insurgents	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Sonnet n° 4	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Audace en opéra-comique. Rondo	
Voix Clavier	
Tout que Robin	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Au fond d'une lacune, valse	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Vous en demandez l'histoire	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Dans un bon salon et sous le toit	W. A. Mozart
Clavier	
Sonnet n° 4 du deuxième recueil	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Finances musicales	
Voix Clavier	
Canzoncetta. Cadenza	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Où tout que tu es, simple belle	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Romances sur le bord d'une mer	Anne Louise Brillon de Jouy
Wagner l'entraîne de la belle musique	Frédéric Schumann
Opéra	
Nu tout de suite	Gabriel Fauré
Quand on s'ennuie au bord de l'eau	Maurice Yvain et Jean Sauterail

The second weekend was to the Landes and Gers regions about two hours south of Bordeaux. I stayed at Bellevue Chateau, a small hotel in the town of Cazaubon which interestingly has a bull-fighting arena!



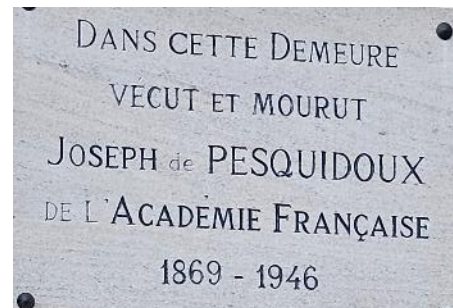


According to the visitor brochure the area is also known for its churches.

At the time of my visit the exhibition space L'Arche Saint-Martin was showing contemporary photography by Karine Lhemon entitled Les Maisons Silencieuses. The subjects were of churches in the vicinity that are now closed. Very moving.



We visited Chateau et Parc de Pesquidoux which has been in the same family for five centuries! The park, in the English style was first designed by Edouard Andre in the mid-19th C. Specimen trees exist from many regions of the world. The chateau is typical of the architecture of this region. The family has a history of writers.



The America 250 event took place at Chateau de Caumal. Originally built as a military fort, recent owners embellished the interior with furnishings of their life in the Caribbean.

They created some new of the earlier wall murals.



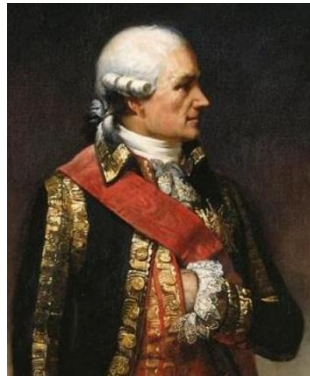
murals while preserving bits



The upper floor is accessed in the tower. Among the furnishings were a curious cup, specifically designed for men with mustaches!



the tide of the American offers tours and is such as this one.



The day included a reception, tours of the chateau, dinner and a concert. The reason for this venue is that the French General Rochambeau, whose battle strategy George Washington credited with the victory at Yorktown that turned Revolution, had ties here. The property popular for weddings and other events



This is the French region that produces Armagnac but we didn't have time to visit a distillery. These visits highlight the convenience of being domiciled in Europe!