

TRAVEL



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EUROPE ISSUE

Europe's geologic spectacles are as awe-inspiring as its manmade attractions



MARIJO BANDIC/CROATIAN NATIONAL TOURISM BOARD



PETER MORRISON/AP FILE

ROCKING DESTINATIONS: The Plitvice lakes, left, in Croatia offer a network of waterfalls and rushing water over eroding limestone. At right, Northern Ireland's Giants Causeway is made up of thousands of columns of basaltic rock. Below, the white Cliffs of Dover on the English Channel.

NATURAL WONDERS

BY JAY CLARKE
Special to the Miami Herald

Europe is full of wonders. They beckon to visitors almost everywhere on the continent — Paris' Eiffel Tower, Rome's Colosseum, Athens' Parthenon, St. Petersburg's Winter Palace and dozens of other glorious man-made icons.

Then there is Old World charm — the joy of exploring Europe's great cities and picturesque villages, delving into history, partaking in its vast cultural offerings, feasting on foods and food preparations unlike those at home.

Most of any visit to Europe will be consumed with enjoying its cities and experiencing the customs, cultures and lifestyles that have endured for centuries. But beyond those pursuits await other wonders, those created not by man but by nature. Be they cliffs or gorges, unusual formations or spectacular waterways, they are as awesome and inspiring as Europe's man-made attractions.

Over many trips, I have balanced visits to Europe's cities with

• TURN TO WONDERS, 7J

INSIDE Star struck on the Dalmatian Coast, 4J
Lyon: The French capital of charcuterie, 5J



JASON HAWKES/VISITBRITAIN

FRANCE

Plenty of ooh-la-la

BY LINDSY VAN GELDER
Special to the Miami Herald

Ah, Paris. City of light, of love, of Moulin Rouge and film noir, catwalks and cobblestones, Art Nouveau lamp posts on moonlit bridges, champagne flutes clinking at sidewalk cafes. ... And, of course, playgrounds.

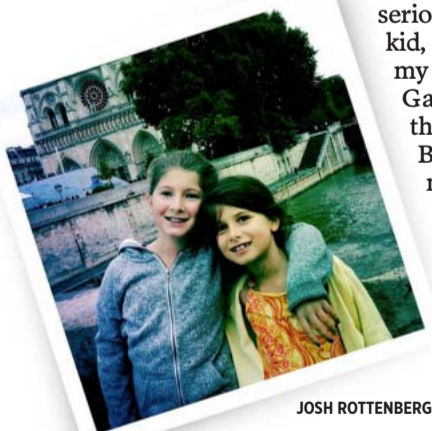
My acquaintance with the kid underbelly of the French capital started with my frequent flyer miles. I had a lot of

AMERICANS IN PARIS: Rebecca, below left, and Julia Rottenberg, at Notre Dame. At right, the Musée d'Orsay.

them. So I offered to take my daughter, my son-in-law and my 11- and 7-year-old granddaughters anywhere that American Airlines flies. The adults picked Paris.

I was admittedly a little nervous. I love Paris, and I know it well. But, seriously? If I were a kid, I'd rather spend my vacation in the Galapagos or, for that matter, Miami Beach. For months before the trip, I sent

• TURN TO PARIS, 4J



JOSH ROTTENBERG



REBECCA ROTTENBERG

TRAVELWISE

Think small when choosing a hotel

BY RICK STEVES
www.ricksteves.com

A major expense of any European vacation is the cost of accommodations. No matter where you go, whether a bustling city like Madrid or a mid-sized destination like Sevilla, the neighborhood and hotel you choose help shape your experience. But you don't have to spend a fortune to find a nice, comfortable place to rest your head every night.

While many travelers opt for modern chains or big, business-class hotels, I find that these tend to build a wall between you and the people and culture you traveled so far to experience. Spending less usually gives you a richer experience. I often hear

about people coming back from their vacations with bruised and battered pocketbooks, complaining about their \$450-a-night room in London. True, you can spend that much, but I never have. That's three days' accommodations for me.

The most important factor in selecting a hotel — assuming it's in my price range — is location. I prefer small-scale hotels in a cozy neighborhood. For example, in Paris, the area around my favorite market street, Rue Cler, is a pedestrian-friendly bit of village Paris and a 10-minute walk from the Eiffel Tower. For me, this is part of the fun of travel: enjoying a warm

• TURN TO TRAVELWISE, 6J

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CROATIA

Stalked in the Balkans

■ France has Jerry Lewis. Germany has David Hasselhoff. So, really, why shouldn't the EU's newest member have its own American idol?

BY CHARLES BUHMAN
cbuhman@miamiherald.com

It's the eve of Croatia's entry into the European Union, and we're here for a drive along the Dalmatian Coast, maybe a little island hopping in the Adriatic — not to be stalked by some American tough guy.

We just smile when we learn our hotel's Wi-Fi password is chucknorris. And we have to wonder when we see a Chuck Norris pizza on a menu. But then it gets eerie when on Korcula, the legendary birthplace of Marco Polo, we find Chuck Norris T-shirts competing with the island's favorite son at the souvenir shops. What's up with that?

Yes, Croatia is rife with art and culture and history — everywhere you turn is another UNESCO World Heritage site — but this mystery needs solving. And who better to ask than a taxi driver? Anyone will tell you taxi drivers know more about their town than tour guides, and this one explains that the national obsession probably comes from watching way too much *Walker: Texas Ranger* on TV. Turns out Croatians get lots of American shows,

all broadcast in the original English with Croatian subtitles. (That also helps explain why almost all Croatians speak at least passable English, though some things get lost in translation: An airport transfer service hopes we will enjoy the plush "conformity" of its limousines; a pizzeria entices us with a pie topped with "smallpox on Red.")

That mystery behind us, we arrive at our first World Heritage site, Dubrovnik's walled old town, to find a delightful maze of plazas and alleyways. Walking atop the ramparts we come across a sign that says simply "cold drinks" with an arrow pointing to, well, a hole in the wall. The place is Buza, a wildly popular al fresco bar with little tables set on little ledges carved into the enormous rocks. We have our cocktails and watch daredevils leap off the cliff next to a sign that forbids diving. And on our way back to the hotel we come across a bit of graffiti on a storefront window: "Buza — Chuck Norris was here."

We figure we can lose him on the Dalmatian coast drive. I'm pretty sure that if

I don't hit a speed trap I can make it to Split in four hours. We'll make it in four days, stopping in:

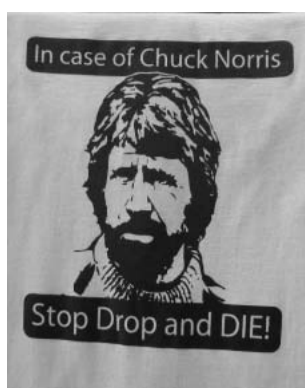
Ston: Home to "Europe's Great Wall of China." At about five miles, it's a bit shorter than the Asian version, but still a pretty imposing piece of work.

Mostar: In neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, home to the iconic Stari Most bridge, a World Heritage site. Young men are said to leap from it into the icy water below for tips. We see one fellow threaten to jump several times, but he never follows through.

The Biokovo Mountains: A one-lane road with two-way traffic snakes its way to a 5,000-foot-plus peak with hardly a guardrail in sight. Are there no personal injury lawyers?

Tucepi: One of a handful of towns along the Makarska Riviera with pebble beaches, pristine waters and inexpensive apartment-like lodgings that attract families with kids, lots of kids, and an ice cream vendor every block or so.

There have been no further Chuck Norris sightings except for the occasional T-shirt shop ("Guns don't kill people. Chuck Norris Kills People") and by the time we get to Diocletian's Palace (yes, another World Heritage Site), we



STAR STRUCK: Chuck Norris T-shirts are a staple in Croatian souvenir shops. At right, graffiti seen in Dubrovnik's old town.



PHOTOS BY CHARLES BUHMAN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF



MARCO RUIZ / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

think we've lost him. We are wrong. Our favorite source, a taxi driver, tells us about the local baker who decided her shop had been burgled once too often. She made a poster warning that the place was now under the protection of Chuck Norris — and she has been crime-free ever since.

A short drive away is Trogir, yet another World Heritage site we have to see, but there is no escape. Seems Chuck Norris has been thrust into Trogir politics by the People's Party candidate for mayor Frane Žižak. According to local media reports, Žižak was inspired by other recent elections in which many Croats were actually voting for Chuck Norris. Žižak's campaign message: Maybe Chuck Norris could clean up the town in just a day, Žižak can do it given a four-

year term.

It probably sounded like a good idea at the time, but like France, which is getting over its love affair with Jerry Lewis, and Germany, getting past its infatuation with David Hasselhoff, it looks like there's hope for

Croatia.

Turns out poor Frane got just 11 percent of the vote in the summer election and the Democratic Union candidate, a fellow named Ante Stipčić, is now happily ensconced in the mayor's office.

FRANCE

There's plenty of ooh-la-la for the kids in Paris

• PARIS, FROM 1J

the girls books about Paris, but it's not easy to convey the city's magical *joie de vivre*. (As 11-year-old Rebecca later told me, "I had a stereotypical view that everyone in Paris was a guy with a mustache, a beret and a baguette under his arm.") I envisioned glazed eyes and zero *ooh la la*.

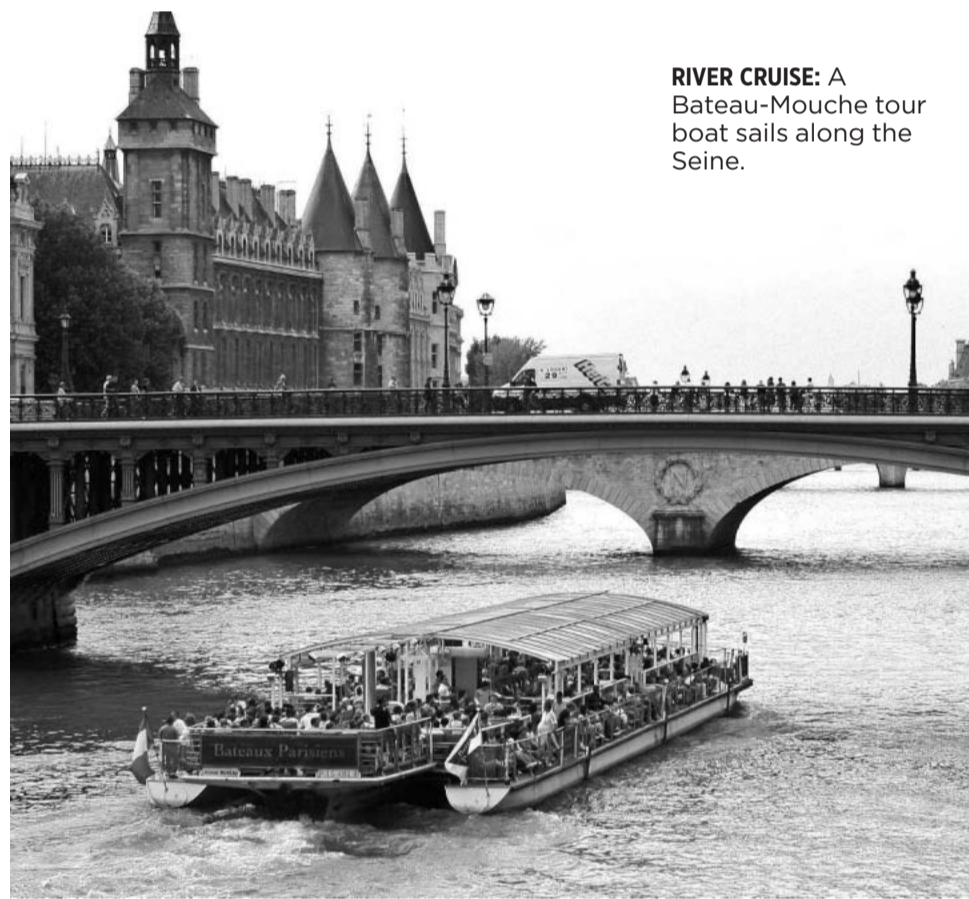
My misgivings disappeared when we emerged from the metro station after the trip from the airport. Rebecca gazed up, jet-lagged but goggle-eyed, at the city's distinctive creamy limestone architecture, blue slate mansard roofs and filigreed balconies, and immediately shouted, "OH MY GOD! IT'S PARIS! IT'S REALLY PARIS!" And began snapping away madly with her iPod camera.

This paparazzi routine was a recurring motif during our week in Paris and the three days we spent at the beach in nearby Normandy. Telling kids to find some good pictures to take — in Paris, or I suspect, anywhere — will focus their attention, even if you're someplace they might otherwise find less than scintillating.

The adults — four of us, since my other daughter joined us for part of the trip — naturally had activities we were eager to do. But we also had a list of child-friendly pursuits, including the Bateau-Mouches tour boats, the Catacombs, the famous Berthillon ice cream stand on the Ile St-Louis, the Eiffel Tower, the gargoyles of Notre Dame, the Cite des Enfants children's museum, the sidewalk artists and street performers in Montmartre and Les Halles, and the city's various parks, such as the Tuileries, the Luxembourg Gardens, the Bois de Boulogne and the Jardin des Plantes.

There were some hot spots that we never even got to, including the Eiffel Tower. (After a close-up cruise-by look from the Bateau-Mouche, the kids stopped lobbying for the view from the top.) But the master list gave us daily flexibility to adjust to the weather and to what was near our other destinations. There was at least one pit stop for the younger set every day — sometimes the whole day.

Rebecca turned out to be easy. She's an artistic kid, although not previously much of a fan of looking at other people's artwork indoors. But the museums of Paris really clicked for her, far more than any of the adults



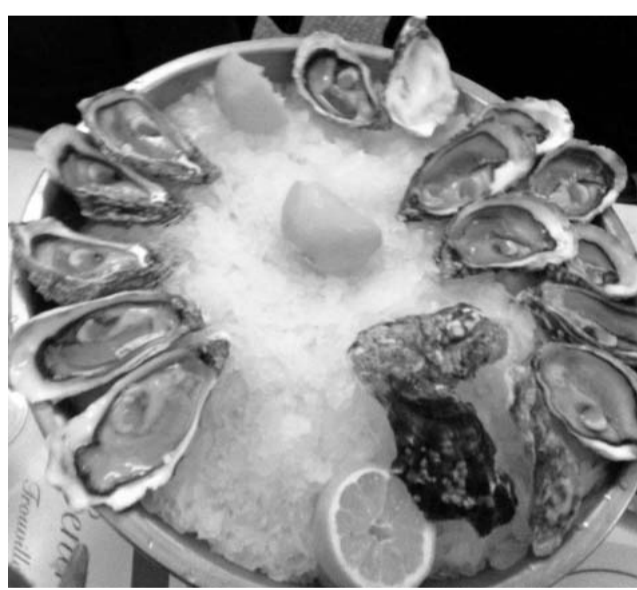
JACQUES BRINON/AP

RIVER CRUISE: A Bateau-Mouche tour boat sails along the Seine.

anticipated. In the Louvre, she was transfixed by the *Mona Lisa*. "I did a report in third grade on Leonardo da Vinci, and it was amazing to be right next to something he actually physically touched," she marveled. (Moral of the story: Although you shouldn't count on traveling the way you would without children, at least give them a chance to appreciate why Paris is one of the world's leading adult tourist destinations.)

The kid-oriented stops were crucial for 7-year-old Julia, whose idea of a good time usually involves either Harry Potter or a surfboard. The city's gorgeously manicured parks turned out to be a surprisingly interesting cultural experience, too — with merry-go-rounds, trampolines, boat-sailing ponds, puppets, chessboards and other exotica rarely seen on American playgrounds. (Which did Julia like better? "They're both cool," she decreed, "but in different ways.")

Probably the biggest challenge (and most fun) for both girls involved simply fitting into new rhythms. "I don't know why, but when you go into a shop in France, it's really rude not to say 'bon jour' when you enter and 'au revoir' when you leave," I explained early on. To American kids who may never even make eye contact with clerks in stores, this was a novel concept, but they rose to the task. They were other parlez-vous-ing all the other basic-politeness phrases, as well as asking for



JULIA ROTTENBERG

NEW TREATS: The girls tried many dishes for the first time, including this plate of oysters in Normandy, left, and Parisian pastries, right.

Tips for families in Paris

Check out what's online before you wait in line. Queuing up for hours is a big snore for adults, and it's even worse torture for fidgety kids. But numerous Paris attractions, including the Eiffel Tower and the Musee D'Orsay, take online reservations. Paper tickets are usually required, so if you wait to arrange yours until you're in Paris, email them to the front desk of your hotel and let them print them out for you.

Don't give in to American fast food. When the kids want something familiar to eat, grab some baguettes — the French word not only for long, thin loaves of bread, but for long, thin chopsticks. Paris has fantastic Asian restaurants all over town (often a strange melange of Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai), with particular concentrations in the neighborhood known as La Petite Asie off the Avenue de Choisy in the 13th arrondissement deep in the left bank, and in the right bank neighborhood of Belleville around the metro stop of the same name. One of our most memorable meals was at a tiny, mostly takeout Szechuan noodle and dumpling joint near our hotel (Yodia, 3 rue des Patriarches, 5th arrondissement).

Get out of town. As lovely as Paris is, there's much more to France. For kids in particular, a few days in the countryside or on the coast is a great way to get over jet lag or to chill at the end of a busy trip. We chose the quaint, family-oriented seaside town of Trouville-sur-Mer, about a two-hour train ride from Paris. It has a long shorefront promenade with miniature golf and pony rides, and enough shopping and dining options to keep grown-ups happy. We really liked the beach-view family suite at the Hotel Le Flaubert (www.flaubert.fr).



REBECCA ROTTENBERG

their room key in French. I almost burst with pride one day when they were skipping arm in arm up the Rue Mouffetard pedestrian street, bumped into someone, and instantly chorused, "Pardon! Excusez-moi!"

The fact that Paris is so far north meant that summer nights stayed light until 10, and the girls were up late (which also usually meant that getting everyone up, clean and ready for breakfast before the hotel stopped serving at 11 a.m. was an impossible dream). Having our own kitchen would have solved the problem, but when I had looked for apartments that could accommodate a family our size, the pickings were as slim as a Chanel suit ... and in any case we liked the convenience of hotel maid service.

But the typical French dining schedule — specific prescribed times for meals, few restaurants with continuous service, little snacking — took some adjustment.

The food itself, however, was a smashing success. Moments after their arrival, I brought the girls to a patisserie and introduced them to the glories of the Paris-Brest eclair. "That ... was ... the best pastry I ever had," said Rebecca, in the reverent tones usually reserved for seeing the stained glass rose window at Notre Dame. This became a refrain. "I never knew croissants and hot chocolate could be this good," Julia declared after our first breakfast together, in a restaurant that blessedly served Parisian.

Like Parisians, we sometimes ate Greek, Italian, or

Asian food for lunch or dinner, but mostly we dined a *la francaise*. The kids chowed down rare duck breast in chocolate orange sauce. Ditto for terrine of grapefruit with tea sauce. They ate macarons in weird flavors, like mojito. They ate stinky cheese. They ate cold soup. (They did draw the line at snails.) They also took photographs of food. A lot of photographs of food.

Restaurant bathrooms were as culturally noteworthy as playgrounds, from modern self-cleaning toilets with whirling seats to old school models with a tank above and a pull chain. (Sadly, neither of our hotels had bidets. I'm still not sure the kids even believed me that they exist.)

Sometimes the key to a

great travel memory was just to let stuff happen. At a bus stop the girls began playing a popular American schoolyard clapping and singing game ("Down by the banks of the Hanky Panky, where the bullfrogs jump from bank to banky ..."). A bunch of local kids who were also waiting for the bus stared with undisguised fascination and then began thwacking out a French equivalent — literally a hands-across-the-sea cross-cultural clapalooza.

I realize that Julia and Rebecca will probably turn into teenagers any minute now, busy hanging out with their peers. But this trip was well worth all those miles — for them, their parents, and certainly for me. As Rick said to Ilsa, "we'll always have Paris."