

My Version of France

When I share with fellow Americans that I am spending a month in France I can only imagine what must come to mind. Images of bustling outdoor cafes, rich meals, baguettes, pastries, exquisite cheeses, shopping and yes some of the best wines in the world. While there is nothing wrong with this part of French culture, if you know me at all, you can guess that this would not be my French experience, ☐ There was a time, twenty five years ago, when that list served as my guide. I sought out all of the above in addition to the best café au lait and of course meringues! However, since I am now living a different chapter of my life, I have different priorities.

To be clear, France has not changed. You can rest assured all of that and more is still readily available. What has changed however, is my discovery that there is so much beyond. There exists a completely different set of sensory pleasures that I could only appreciate as I began to change myself. Once I learned to embrace simplicity and become comfortable with quiet and solitude; noise, crowds, and stimulation were no longer appealing and my eyes were able to focus on what lie just beyond.

The Villages

In my humble opinion, the best flavors of France can be found when you depart from the cities and make your way to village life in the countryside. Here you will feel your heart rate slow and begin to take notice of your surroundings. You'll smell the scent of honeysuckle in full bloom that covers the iron gate to the cemetery; see the grandmother who still washes her clothing at the water source and hangs it out to dry; watch the child who has been sent for morning bread at the boulangerie; marvel at the unbelievably teeny delivery trucks designed to maneuver the narrow roads; hear the old men

who have gathered at the cafe to discuss their view of the latest news and long to pick from the mirabellen trees heavy with fruit along the edge of the main road. All of that and the village cats who steal my heart as they sun themselves on the rock walls. My list could go on and on, each addition enriching the layers of character that blend to create the village experience.

The Beauty

Then, there is the accessibility to natural beauty that one can experience without lines, crowds, or an entrance fee. A highly accessible network of walking paths wind through the countryside connecting villages and offering the opportunity to enjoy impeccably protected areas of pure natural beauty. There's nothing like sitting on moss covered stones and dipping your feet into a rushing mountain stream to remind you of what is real and important. This summer I've grown to treasure the morning mist that rolls over the peaks after sunrise as well as the steam that rises from the forest after a summer downpour.

While there is not a museum of masterpieces for miles, there is the everyday art of slow living which is accessible to all who care to witness and partake. Whether we speak of the flatland villages of Alsace, those along the rugged coast of Brittany, or high up in the Pyrenees mountains, it is the village concept and community that brings me back to France.

I am so grateful to have the privilege of this time in France and equally grateful that I am able to share it with you. Thank you. And now I'm already looking forward to sharing next week's note in which I introduce you to some of the lovely individuals who have enriched my time here this summer.

If you'd like to catch a glimpse of my everyday adventures be sure to follow me on Instagram @LaurenHubele.