

PARIS, CHAMONIX AND SICILY 2020 TRIP REPORT

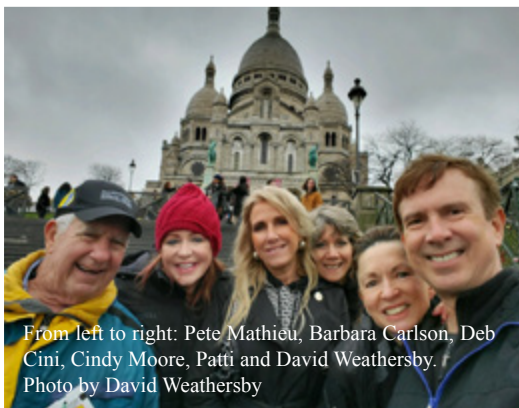
by Joan McAuliffe

PARIS (by Cindy Moore)

Twenty Space City members opted for the 2-day pre-trip to Paris. Small groups went all over Paris drinking in the sites and hundreds of options for fun and touring. One couldn't miss the Eiffel Tower, since we were staying walking distance from it! After check in, Cindy Moore was in a group with Cecilia Newburn, David and Patti Weathersby, Barbara Carlson, Deb Cini trying to figure out the subway-type train system. The price was right, but we were totally confused as to how and where to transfer to the other train to get us to the Montmartre area. The locals were friendly, but many didn't understand English. Some tried to help us, but we felt like we were going around in circles. We finally arrived and toured the Sacre'-Cœur De Montmartre Cathedral and the area. The next "game" for some was to find a bank to exchange money. Pete had missed our group, so we were meeting him there, and he was getting there on his own. He beat us all there! Cindy vowed to return with him in the subway since he had lots of experience in traveling in Paris before. She was in the bowels of the subway for the return when Pete revealed that he beat us because he took a taxi, not because of extensive knowledge of the subway, and we got more lost trying to get back to the hotel than we did getting there!

The second day in Paris had many touring the famous museums. Barbara, Deb, Cecilia and Cindy had signed up for a tour of the famous Louvre Museum and were not disappointed.

In the world's largest art museum, who did they run into by David and Patti! They met up with Pete for lunch nearby.



From left to right: Pete Mathieu, Barbara Carlson, Deb Cini, Cindy Moore, Patti and David Weathersby.
Photo by David Weathersby

The last night in Paris people broke up in very small groups doing various night adventures. All we heard from the moment of arrival was David Weathersby trying to get a group together to go to the famous Moulin Rouge for a show. When we all figured out we had to be up at the crack of dawn to catch the train to get to Chamonix, those who had been contemplating it backed out. The 11:00 p.m. show was much cheaper, so David and Patti persevered and went to the late show! David said he didn't regret it as it was the highlight of the entire trip for him!



David and Patti Weathersby at the Moulin Rouge.
photo by David Weathersby

Cindy and Barbara did the night time Paris river tour which was exceptional! As we floated by the famous charred Notre-Dame Cathedral, you could not only see the charred areas which were in the process of restoration, but you could still smell the burnt odor. It started very close to the Eiffel Tower, which was its own light show on the hour.

After that Barbara helped Cindy shop for the groceries for the high speed train club lunch party for the next day. When they finally found a grocery store, they had to move with lightning speed as it was going to close soon. They searched for wine and fruit in the dark, but managed to get the job done!

THE TRAIN RIDE ADVENTURE

So, catching a train in France is easy with a group of 20, right? Well, we learned you should get on the platform as soon as humanly possible as the loading process takes a bit of finesse. Our group had LOTS of luggage. Getting the luggage all on in the short time you have to board was a bit of a process. If it wasn't for Chuck Pena coming to the rescue (he had done this before with a group on a prior SCSC European trip) we would probably still be standing on that platform! He took charge from the inside and got some of the luggage all the way to the other end of our car, so that we could get it all on and barely got everyone on board before the train started rolling away! Whew! And now, time to relax, enjoy the scenery and for some, play Rummy Cub.

As lunchtime neared, the wine started flowing and the party was ON! Cindy bought all pre-trippers a commemorative Paris cup for their sipping vessel. We broke out the lunch and everyone made wonderful sandwiches from an assortment of meats and cheeses and got an apple and a cookie. We went through 17 bottles of fabulous French red wine on that trip, and we were in rare form, when we arrived in Geneva.

When we arrived Geneva station, we finally found our bus driver and headed to Chamonix!

CHAMONIX

We arrived in Chamonix to find less than ideal conditions for skiing. It was raining! We hooked up with our main trip participants and Cindy thanks Evan Howell, for tipping the main trip bus driver for her! As host of the first Winter Olympics in 1924, Chamonix will always have a place in the history books. Situated north of Mont Blanc, Chamonix is one of the oldest ski resorts in France



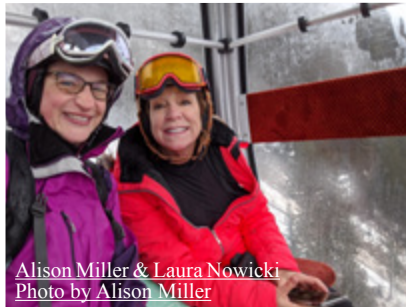
Photo by Joan McAuliffe

and is located less than 10 miles from the Swiss and Italian borders. It will also have a place in the hearts of 30 Space City Ski Club adventurers who traveled to the 2020 TSC Winter Expedition.



Our home for the week, the La Folie Douce Hotel (The Sweet Madness), gave us our room keys on our wrist in a sort of bracelet, so you almost couldn't lose your key! What a novel idea! Why don't all hotels do this? This incredible hotel lived up to its reputation and was full of energy in the evenings with amazing entertainment including aerial shows. The downstairs bar had live bands nightly and the upstairs bar was hopping good fun with a great D.J. The breakfast buffet and coffee machines spoiled us rotten. The included dinners were filling and fabulous. The "brown gravy" that was characteristic of most of their dishes was the brunt of many jokes throughout the week.

Laura and new member Alison Miller skied on Sunday from the hotel in Chamonix. The slopes were slushy but still better than any possible ski conditions in Houston! They finally called it quits though when they were completely soaked through with rain and visibility...



Alison Miller & Laura Nowicki
Photo by Alison Miller

The rain lasted through Monday, but some braved the slopes on Monday, as the rain wasn't as hard. Kevin Juhl and John Kimbrough joined us from Oregon and skied the French Alps everyday! Other avid skiers were Argentinian Daniel Cioffi, who met up with his friends Carlos Gonzalez and Christiane "Chili" Hile to ski on this trip, and Craig Campbell. Chuck Pena snowboarded with friends in the TSC most of the trip.

On Tuesday, with fresh snow, most were able to hit the slopes. Others took advantage of the spa, shopping, and sightseeing in Chamonix.



Pete Mathieu and Deb Cini
Photo by Joan McAuliffe



Sandy Oballe and Judy Clifton Fox

AOSTA

Aosta is the capital of Italian region of Valle d'Aosta. The

town is in a small valley with houses going up the slopes of the surrounding mountains. Several SCSC adventurers went on this excursion to discover and tour ancient ruins and shopping.

WINE TASTING EXCURSION

A fun group of 30 TSC members went on a fabulous wine tasting tour in Switzerland mid-week. We went to 2 excellent wineries and were able to meet and bond with members from other TSC clubs. At the first one, we were honored to be taken down to the cellar and tasted wine straight from a barrel. They had yummy snacks to eat between tastings. At the 2nd winery we enjoyed a fantastic view of Lake Geneva and had the best weather of the week with sunshine all day! We also had a traditional cheese fondue lunch.



Group photo on Wine Tour
Photo by Cindy Moore



Photo by Cindy Moore

CHILLON CASTLE, GRUYERE AND MONTREUX

On Thursday, after a beautiful ride through the Swiss countryside, we arrived at Chillon Castle on the shores of Lake Geneva. The rocky island on which the castle is built, was both a natural protection and a strategic location to control the passage between northern and southern Europe.



Photo by Joan McAuliffe



Photo by Cindy Moore

After a tour of the castle we moved on to the town of Gruyere to enjoy free samples while learning about its origin and production process *at the Gruyere Cheese Factory*.

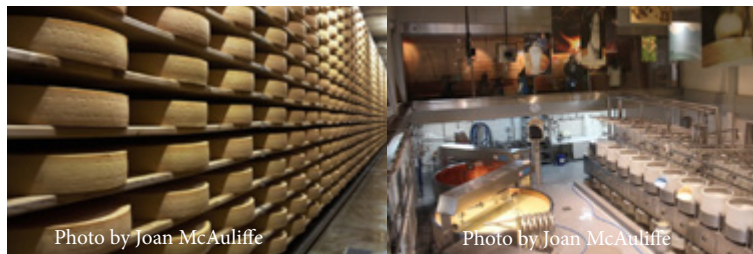


Photo by Joan McAuliffe

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Next stop, Montreux, Switzerland. It's no surprise that Charlie Chaplin chose to spend his last 25 years there, or that Igor Stravinski composed "The Rite of Spring" in Montreux. Set against the stunning backdrop of the shores of Lake Geneva, Montreux is a feast for the eyes. After finding a place for lunch, many members walked along the flowered lakeside promenade while Jim and Laura Nowicki hit the casino.



Photo by Joan McAuliffe

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ANNENCY

The last tour was to the beautiful medieval town of Annecy on Friday. The pure, clear water flows from the lake into the canals running through the old town. It is easy to see how it got the name "Venice of the Alps", The Palais de l'île, a tiny castle on an island, provided the most picturesque view in old town. A tour of the city took us to the Chateau d'Annecy, the Baroque Cathedral of Saint-Pierre and Lake Annecy. The cathedral had water running under it. Deb Cini spent the whole

time shopping in the quaint stores. Everyone broke up into smaller groups to have lunch, then smaller groups to sight see. Cindy and Cheryl and John Woltemate toured the The Palais de l'île, which most recently had been turned into a prison.

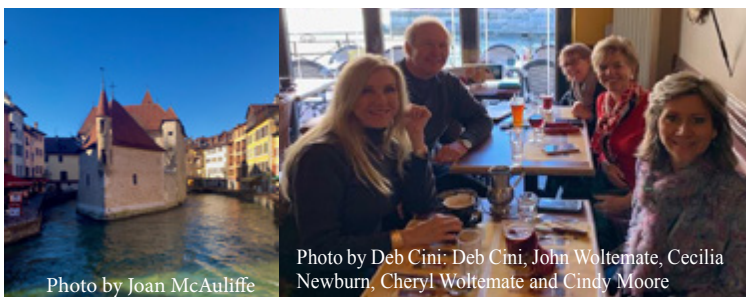


Photo by Joan McAuliffe

Photo by Deb Cini: Deb Cini, John Woltemate, Cecilia Newburn, Cheryl Woltemate and Cindy Moore

our group up very early to catch a bus to Geneva for flights home. Pete Mathieu, Sandy Oballe, Judy Clifton Fox, Chuck Pena, Tom and Mary Huzzey and Ana Alvarez, got to sleep in a little later to catch the bus to go to Geneva to fly to Palermo for the Sicily post-trip. Cindy Moore received rave reviews about the post trip, but we didn't get enough information to be able to expound on it in this article. Many said that it was the best part of the trip and we should have done it!

The best news is that all returned safe and sound in time to avoid the Corona-virus that was starting up in Europe, and we didn't have ANY injuries!!!!

From Joan: A big thank you to Cindy Moore for coordinating this wonderful trip.

From Cindy: A big thank you from Cindy to the following people who really helped her on this trip without an assistant TC: Barbara Carlson, Evan Howell, Chuck Pena, Karen Gertz, Dale and Alice Allbritton and last, but not least, new member Joan McAuliffe for gathering photos and writing most of this article! I couldn't have done this without all of you!