

MA VIE EN FRANCE



THANKSGIVING

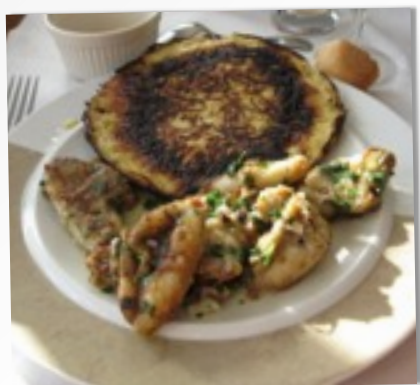
CHOCOLATE FASHION SHOW

Happy Thanksgiving to All!

Happy Thanksgiving, everyone ! It's the time of year to thank everyone for the things that they've done, and it's apparent that I owe you a large thank you for allowing me to come here this year. You made these wonderful experiences possible and I can't thank you enough.!

I'm not ready for it to already be Christmas and the end of 2011. The first time I entered the Supermarket and saw that there were already the decorations and candy for Christmas, I was shocked. I can't believe it - each month passes a little faster. Already at the end of December it will be time

for me to leave my first host family. It's really unbelievable. While I know my future families are also nice, it will be hard - I've grown to really love my current host family, and it will be hard to move to a different house and leave them behind.



FRENCH CUISINE



ODDS AND ENDS



THANKSGIVING IN FRANCE

«In France, cooking is a serious art form and a national sport.» - Julia Child

French Cuisine

When people hear the word «French» or «France,» there are many different things that come to mind. Perhaps you think of the wine, the baguettes, the escargot, the frog legs, the beret, Paris... It's a little different for every person, but one thing that is sure is that the cuisine is often at least part (if not the dominating part) that comes to mind, and for a good reason ! There is really a special type of cuisine here, and I'm going to try and explain some of the different aspects of the cuisine.

REGIONAL SPECIALTIES

One thing that's really different is the fact that here, each region has a different specialty (see below for some of the specialties of the regions). The French really change what they eat depending on where they are, what foods are in season, etc.



Meat here is also different. It's real meat - it is raised on a farm in open-air conditions, it's killed by a butcher; it doesn't have loads of preservatives and it's never packaged in plastic and shipped about (or at least, my family doesn't buy that type of meat). They also eat different types of meat and more of the parts. This is a photo of my first taste of lapin (rabbit).

How Do They Do It?

How is it that the French manage to eat well each day? They work, just like in the United States, so how can they find the time to do it all? Well, the answer is two-fold. First off, like anywhere else, each family is different, so not everyone eats well every day, but my family does (and I believe there are more people than in the US who eat well). The other

part is that the French eat late. In my family, we normally start to eat at 8 or 9 at night (and if it's a party, it's not uncommon to start at 10). In this manner, they are able to take the time to cook. Also, they are masters of utilizing the leftovers - they combine leftovers with something small that's new to make a delicious meal.



BRETAGNE: The galettes (a type of deluxe cracker/cake), the crepe, and seafood. The crepe is very different - you often have an egg sunny side up, meat, and some vegetables.



NORTH-EAST: In the North East, the specialty is frites and moules (fries and mussels). Perhaps an odd combination in the US, but it's really delicious !



SOUTH Made famous by Harry Potter, bouillabaisse is a soup-type dish made from a mix of different species of fish. Seafood is also very common here along the coast.

«Skinny Bitch»

In the US, the book «Skinny Bitch» talks of how the French manage to eat well (and seemingly a lot), yet they don't have the same type of obesity problem that the US has (although that is slowly changing as more and more people begin eating the packaged foods they buy from the supermarket). I've never read the book, but it's true that people here eat well yet are not fat. How do they do it? How is it possible to eat the tarts and the cheese and the bread without gaining weight? Here are some things I've noticed :

- People here don't snack. They eat three times per day. In the US, I always had to snack, but here the lunch and dinner are real meals, so you don't get (too) hungry in between).
- Proportions here are reasonable. They eat well at a meal, but they don't eat a large plate of pasta or a large steak or anything like that. Instead, they eat several things which are each smaller.
- They eat a lot of fruits and vegetables. Fruit is often served as a dessert. My family only buys the fruits and vegetables that are in season and are produced in the vicinity of our town.
- People here don't drink milk. It's often water or (for the adults) wine. Perhaps you have a little bit of milk with your tea or coffee, but not much other than that.
- People here really eat for the taste. Because of that, they are not afraid to cook with cream, spices, or a bit of salt, but it's not in the same way as in the US - it's really just an added spice and flavor : it's not ever over-dominating of the flavor of the food.



Endive Tart

VEGETABLES

The way people eat vegetables here is really different. Perhaps you have lettuce with a vinaigrette, ratatouille (although now we're past the season for that), a tomato, pumpkin soup, boiled peppers... the possibilities are endless ! However, my family here buys according to the season, so we're now entering winter where we eat a lot of pumpkin and endives. Endives you can eat in a tart (delicious) and the pumpkin you can use to make a soup, a gratin, a purée, etc.

FRESH BREAD

There are a lot of diets in the US that condemn carbs and therefore bread. I'm glad that isn't a fad in France, because their bread is delicious. There is of course the regular baguette, but you can also buy wheat, multi-grain, ciabatta, and other types. It's very different from anything I've tried in the states.

However, perhaps as different as the type of bread is the way they eat it. You eat the bread with the meal, not as an appetizer, and you never put butter on it (unless it's at breakfast). You use it to clean your plate and to aid in eating food (and afterwards, with the cheese).

Another thing that is different is that if you buy a sandwich at a boulangerie here, it is a baguette (often full-sized) with all sorts of things (including eggs) on it.



DESSERT

Dessert here is interesting. Depending on the day, you might have a «real» dessert of a tart (which is just the pie-like crust with fruit and some butter and sugar melted on top) (or, if you are at a restaurant, perhaps crème brûlée), but if you're just at home, it's often fruit, yogurt, cheese, or perhaps a piece of dark chocolate (or a mixture of those things).

«Forever on Thanksgiving Day, the heart will find the pathway home.» - Wilbur D. Nebit

The idea of making a Thanksgiving dinner for my first time in a foreign country with people who tend to think that American cuisine is inferior was quite daunting at the beginning, as was the idea of having Thanksgiving without my family in the US, but it couldn't have gone better. I'm not exaggerating when I say that it was perfect. Earlier in the week, I had gone shopping with my host mom to buy all of the ingredients (and my parents in the US also sent me the French Onions and Cream of Mushroom Soup for the green bean casserole). We managed to find everything except evaporated milk - we even found cranberries who came from the US and the Granny Smith apples!

My host mom bought some things for the appetizers as well: Carmel corn, chips and homemade guacamole, crackers with a tomato paste, olives, and (of course) the champagne.

Saturday (the 26th) I cooked for the entire day, with the help of my host

mom and two family friends here (and thank goodness for their help, or else I'm not sure if I could have finished in time!). We prepared the Turkey with a Chestnut Stuffing, Sweet Potato Casserole, Green Bean Casserole, Mashed Potatoes, Gravy, Cranberry Sauce, Apple Pie and Pumpkin Pie. We had a lot of fun preparing the meal - between translating everything into French and the already daunting task of cooking everything, there were a lot of laughs (especially when my host father brought the Turkey into the kitchen, and I discovered that it still had it's head!).

I invited my host family here, my Rotary counselor, the family friends who helped with the cooking, another exchange student, and 2 friends from my class. Everyone loved everything (except perhaps the Pumpkin Pie, which they found particular, but then again, so do I). We added a French twist by serving a cheese plate between the meal and dessert, which was a nice addition.



THE MEAL



THE MEAL



BEFORE: THE NON-BEHEADED TURKEY



AFTER



HARD AT WORK

Thanksgiving Day in France

...

In the US, Thanksgiving is perhaps my favorite holiday. It's the beginning of the Holiday Season, it's one of the few times that I'm able to see all of my family, and it doesn't hurt that it's the first mini-break during the school year. Thanksgiving is also the time to really thank everyone for everything that they do for you. As you know, Thanksgiving began following the first winter and harvest of the pilgrims who arrived in America from Europe. The first winter was extremely hard, but with the aid of the Indians, they were able to have a successful harvest. For celebrating that, they created the holiday of Thanksgiving. Because of this history, it's quite obvious (and logical) that France does not observe the holiday, but I didn't let that stop me from being a little bit of the Thanksgiving spirit to my little town of Montbrison.

The actual day of Thanksgiving was difficult: I started school at 8am,

finished at 6pm, and I had a meeting afterwards that didn't finish until about 8pm, something that seemed a little discouraging at first. However, everyone at school was interested in Thanksgiving and really nice. The Wednesday before Thanksgiving I prepared some traditional American

chocolate chip cookies and gave them to my class in History (which, oddly for me, no one had eaten before, but they all liked the taste). So while it was a more difficult day than usual, it was a nice way to share a bit of our holiday.

AMERICAN SURPRISES



Chocolate Chip Cookies : I don't understand this one, and apparently they agree with me - I had a bunch of people demand for the recipe !



Reeses: No one here has tried Reeses before, so I brought some with me to school.

FINDING THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT: VOLUNTEERING WITH ROTARY



I had the opportunity volunteer at a food drive with Rotary. Here, they do things a little differently, and I think it works very well. Here's what we did: we stood at the entry of the store. When the people walked in, we handed out a bag which said «Banque Alimentaire» (Food Bank) on it. There were also papers that people could take with lists of the items the food bank needs. Then the people could place the items in the bag, pay for them, and drop it off with us before they left. It's extremely effective ! There were so many people who at least bought a can, and there were also others who were extremely generous, giving nearly a cart worth ! It was a neat experience, a good thing to do just around the holiday season.

MALADE IN FRANCE



My collection of medicines. It's different from my experiences in the US, where the doctor normally gives just one medicine at a time.

The Medical System in France My First Experience

Not that it was a large encounter with the French medical system, but I had my first bout of sickness this month. I had an «otite,» which is the inflammation and infection of the middle ear (a glorified and more painful ear infection). Because of that, I went to the doctor and the pharmacy for the first time here in France.

First we made an appointment with the actual doctor (not with the «clinic,» because in fact this «clinic» is just two doctors; the doctor who saw me was very nice - her schedule was already full but she offered to stay after to see me). The first thing that was different was the building,

which in fact housed other things as well. There was a certain room on the 2nd floor which was for my doctor. The next thing was that there wasn't a nurse or anyone - in fact, no one took my temperature (she touched my forehead to verify I didn't have a temperature). Then she examined my ears (because I said that was where I had the pain), and there was the diagnosis and all of that, just like in the US.

Afterwards, there was no paperwork for all of the medications. Here, people have one card that is the national medical insurance. The doctor even offered to put it under my host parents' name instead of

under mine (because my host parents will get reimbursed either way and it's less paperwork for them to do it that way). She gave me several different medicines. One was a pain killer, one is a powder that you put in water that is anti-inflammatory, one is a prednisone for helping with breathing with the infection and asthma, one nasal spray, and one for killing the bacteria. She printed out a paper and signed it with this information, and we walked to the pharmacy where they gave us the generic medicines. All together it cost something like 39 euros, and it was all reimbursable.

TOUTES NOS ENVIES



Toutes Nos Envies (All Our Desires) was a movie that I had the opportunity to see this month in theaters.

Synopsis: It's a very complex movie, but in short it follows the life of a woman who is a judge for cases of debt. She ends up helping a woman who has a child in the same class as her children (she lets the woman stay at her house with her family, etc).

However, the main character discovers she has a malignant brain tumor and she has just months to live. She doesn't tell anyone, and at the end of the film, she dies and her husband marries the lady she was helping.

Rating: I really enjoyed this movie - in true French fashion, it was remarkably depressing, but it was still extremely good. It's a pity that French movies aren't often released in the US, but if you ever have the chance to watch this film, I definitely recommend it.

Odds and Ends from My Life in France



JUST LIKE ANY OTHER YEAR,

a year abroad isn't simply made up of amazing traveling and exciting adventures everyday. It is amazing because of your new circumstances, but you aren't necessarily doing things extremely out of the ordinary each day. However, you know you like it somewhere when even the days when you do nothing are fun. One day I helped my host parents rearrange the furniture in our living room, bring in the plants from the garden, watch a film, and make banana bread. The banana bread was really amusing, because they had never made it before, but I gave my host mom a book of American cooking (in French, with French ingredients and commentary), and she saw

it and saw that our bananas were black, so we tried it. It tasted the same (although they saw it as more of a cake than a bread, so they ate it with jam and cream, something I had never seen before, but good none-the-less). It's the little things like that that I've really grown to love here in France.

SCHOOL REVIEW

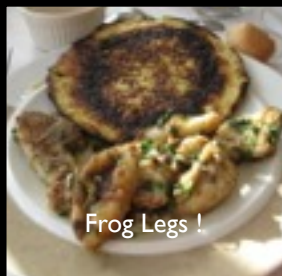
School here is different and the language makes it difficult, but I'm already seeing an improvement in my grades. Everything we're doing in math I've already done, so that's easy, and in English I got 20/20 (the first of the professor's career!) on my assignments, but even in Philosophy (already a difficult subject, made even more confusing by the French) is also improving. I also successfully read by my first book in literature class (it's called «Tous les matins du monde» (All the mornings of the world).



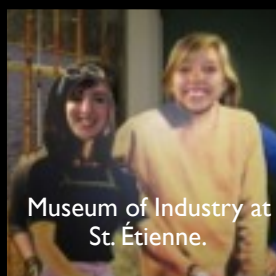
Thanksgiving



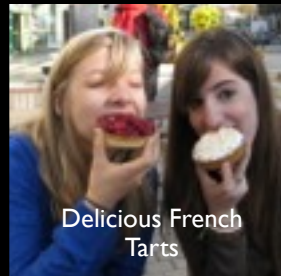
Fête du Chocolat



Frog Legs !



Museum of Industry at
St. Étienne.



Delicious French
Tarts



Musée du Chapeau (Hat Museum)



Visiting St. Étienne with friends.

Month in Review

1. Recommence School
2. Fête du Chocolat
3. Rotary Meeting with District Governor
4. Go to St. Étienne with Friends
5. Try Frog Legs
6. Visit Museum of Art at Lyon with host parents
7. Visit Museum of Industry at St. Étienne
8. Volunteer with Rotary for Food Bank
9. Prepare Thanksgiving meal for French friends and family
10. Visit a Hat Museum

Thank you to all of my donors for
your support.

Aimee Williams

Amy March

Ann Scherf

Anonymous

Carolann

Morykwas

Cheryl Niemeyer

Chris Lindell

David Kennedy

Davis and Eunice
Folkerts

Debbie Tyson

Denis and Denise
Deaver

Erin Wagner

George and Alyce
Werkema

James Hines

Janette Fiedler

Jay, Ann, and Quinn
Murphy

John and Marge
Cooke

Joy Oldfield

Keith Cook and
Sharon Kress

Kevin Deaver

Kimberly Buros -
Rotary Club of
Dubuque

Lisa Skilang

Lorna Richards

Marilyn Mark

Marion-East Cedar
Rapids Rotary
Club

Michael Klappholz

Mike Wiethorn

Nancy Almasi

Patrick Soyer

Penny Olson

Reid Zehrbach

Rockwell City
Rotary Club

Scott Arensdorf

Scott McCain

Shawn Broman

Steve Stickney

Susan Smith

Tina Monroe

William Jacobson