

Loin de Paname: A Young Girl's French Dream

Picture this: you're a nine year old girl moving to a new school. An all-girls school. You arrive for your first day, and everyone already has friends; they've all been going to the school since pre-kindergarten. Your favorite hobby is reading, so at this age, you're automatically weird. Even the girls that like to read pretend that they don't, so there's no place for you here. You're quiet and alone. Until...you walk into the red, white, and blue classroom. The same colors you've always known to be yours, but in a different order...vertical stripes? It's the French classroom, and it soon becomes your safe haven.

Young girls can be very cruel, but my parents wanted the best for me when they moved me to my new school. It was barely affordable, so they worked long hours to send me there in order to give me the best education possible. I hated it almost entirely, but the first day of French class saved me. Languages, especially Latin languages, come easy to me. I am half Colombian; my mom's first language is Spanish, and I've grown up hearing Spanish, picking up phrases, and traveling to Colombia to see family. Most of the other girls in my school had little interest in learning French, but learning a new language instantly fascinated me. At the dinner table I would teach my parents new phrases that I'd learned, and before bed I would practice my vocabulary. As the years went by, my passion for the French language developed into a burning love for the entire culture. In high school, I studied the regions of France and their individual cultures. I quickly learned that while the French are proud of their country, they are debatably even prouder of their regional identities. I studied each region in depth, taking note of their geographical features, weather, major industries, favorite pastimes, local idiomatic expressions, and most importantly, FOOD. I dreamt of one day traveling to France; however, I didn't want to just see Paris and "call it a day." The journey of my dreams involves a nationwide expedition, solidifying my confidence in speaking French while also educating me in all of the unique aspects of regional French culture. I won't allow myself to say that I've "seen France" until I've stood in the middle of a field of lavender in Provence and inhaled deeply with my face towards the sun, sipped a stunning red wine in Bordeaux, and done all of the other incredible things I've learned about in the past 10+ years.

This summer, I have the incredible opportunity to complete my French minor in Lyon through a study abroad program. Although I was accepted in the fall, my parents and I didn't make the final decision until Christmas break because a lot of the finances had to be discussed. After days of planning to find the funds, I finally accepted my offer to study French cuisine and advanced French language in Lyon with a one-week field study in Paris to study art. I am beyond grateful and excited for my trip, and I would never ask my parents for even more money so that I could extend it, but now that I've found the Globetrotter Grant, I am asking you for your help because YOU can extend it and help me achieve the trip of my childhood dreams! I know that most applicants will have grand plans to see multiple countries, but I want to remain true to myself; this is my great dream. I owe so much to this language. So much of my confidence came from that small French classroom so many years ago that gave me a safe place to talk in which people would listen. This grant would allow me to finally explore the valleys, mountains, and wide blue skies of the country that has called my name since I was nine years old.

Itinerary

July 14th – Le quatorze juillet!

I'll start my journey on France's independence day, known in the United States as Bastille Day. I'll leave Lyon from the train station and head for Toulouse, located in the Midi-Pyrenees region.

July 15th – Toulouse

River cruise of the Garonne, offering the best views of some of the oldest sites in the city. I'll spend the afternoon wandering the winding streets of the "pink city," including stops at the Basilica St. Sernin (a UNESCO world heritage site), the Couvent des Jacobins to see the tomb of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Musee de Vieux Toulouse, for some history about the culture of the city in which I am so interested.

July 16th – Toulouse

Start with the Musee des Augustins, the oldest art museum in France besides the Louvre. Bike ride down the Allees Francois Verdier, a beautiful tree-lined path typical of the city. Wander alongside the Canal du Midi, another UNESCO world heritage site and an engineering marvel from the 17th century.

July 17th – Bordeaux

I'll arrive early in Bordeaux (Aquitaine region). I recently completed an enology class, in which I learned all about the science and chemistry of winemaking, and even got to make my own wine! I want to come to Bordeaux because I now have a working knowledge of French wines, and I'm hoping to augment it while I'm there! I'll spend the majority of this first day in La Cite du Vin, an architectural wonder and an extensive museum of wine.

July 18th – Bordeaux

Tour group to multiple vineyards and allow me to get a holistic appreciation of French wine, and the Bordeaux region specifically.

July 19th – Bordeaux

Take the time to experience the city of Bordeaux, taking in sights such as the Place de la Bourse, the Quais de Bordeaux, la Porte Cailhau, and the Bordeaux Cathedral.

July 20th – Nantes

Train to Nantes, located in the Pays-de-la-Loire region. Must see Les Machines de l'Ile, because obviously with my engineering background I was shocked when I first heard about them!! I can't leave France without seeing them!

July 21st – Nantes

Tour le Chateau des Ducs de Bretagne. Explore unique and unusual things that I can find around the city, which is my favorite thing to do when traveling. For example, I'm intrigued by the Hamster Villa, a hotel that gives guests a hamster wheel of their

own and a bed of hay! I've also found Le Nid, which translates to "the nest" and is a bar made out of a giant bird; the seats are eggs!

July 22nd – Orleans

Arrive in Orleans (the Centre region) as early as possible and start touring the city. I'll see sights like the statue of Joan of Arc in the Place du Martroi, the greenery of the Parc Floral de la Source, the Orleans Cathedral, and historic old town.

July 23rd – Orleans

This entire day will be devoted to a guided tour of the Loire Valley Castles.

July 24th – Fin (*the End*)

Travel to Paris and catch a flight back home to Houston, being sure to update my blog one last time!

Cost Breakdown

Category	Cost
Travel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train from Lyon to Toulouse - \$50 • Train from Toulouse to Bordeaux - \$30 • Train from Bordeaux to Nantes - \$100 • Train from Nantes to Orleans - \$70 • Train from Orleans to Paris - \$30 • Taxi from Paris train station to airport - \$30 	\$310
Food - \$50/day	\$500
Additional Fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taxis • Tour groups • Entrance fees (museums, cathedrals, etc.) • Emergencies 	\$1000
Lodging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toulouse Hostel - \$22/night = \$66 • Bordeaux Hostel - \$24.50/night = \$73.50 • Nantes Hostel - \$9/night = \$18 • Orleans Hostel - \$26/night = \$52 	\$209.50
Total Cost: \$2,019.50	
Personal Savings: \$700	
Final Cost: \$1,319.50	

Thank you for your time and consideration!