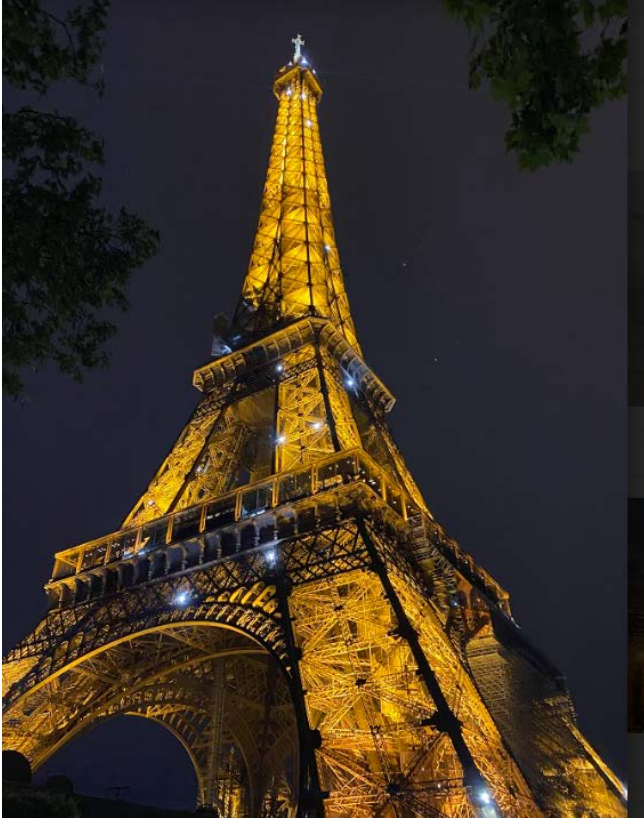


# France

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TRAVIS OTTE

# Paris



Paris was certainly an experience. Going from showing up on the first day too scared to order French food and getting some Vietnamese instead to the confidence I have now with interacting with others is a bizarre thought. The Eiffel tower was beautiful, but I understand why the French don't hold it in high regard. In a city with such a rich, formative history, having an insignificant, albeit beautiful, tower perceived as the centerpiece seems like it would be annoying.

The restaurant is one that me, Tony, and Vanessa went to. The owner, and server, spoke at least 3 languages and was incredibly kind and welcoming, quite different from the angry Frenchman stereotype I'd expected. It was also a new experience, making new friends in a new place. We were all shoved out of our comfort zone at once, and it created great friendships extremely fast.



# Louvre

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I enjoyed the Louvre more than I expected to. I figured I wouldn't be able to appreciate the art there, but with Patrick's guidance, I understood the significance of statues like the one in the top right, or the painting to the right. In context, with understanding they are truly incredible. I included the sculptures of Hannibal Barca and Julius Caesar because they are two of my favorite historical figures, and seeing them juxtaposed against each other really stuck with me.

# Normandy

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Normandy was one of my favorite experiences of the trip. I've always been fascinated by military history, and seeing the beaches I'd heard so much about was a surreal experience. Seeing the American cemetery too, was incredibly eye-opening. Thinking that in a different time, instead of studying abroad in Europe, my friends and I could have been storming the beaches we were tourists at, and ended up in the ground instead of on top of it. I've always wanted to see Normandy, and the experience was everything I'd wanted and more.

# Brittany

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I had never heard of Brittany, but now, I will recommend it to anyone visiting France. San Malo was unlike any other city we saw, with walls, and a medieval feel, I believe it's something that must be done in France. The crepes were the best I had, and the cider was delicious. Mont Sainte Michael was also incredible. I loved seeing the change in the tide while we were there and hearing the history of the place. Walking around the city with Tony and Vanessa was an experience I will never forget.

# Aix

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Calling Aix home over the past month has been a pleasure. When I first got here, I didn't see the charm of the city, but as time went on, I came to appreciate the little things. Some of my favorite souvenirs, I got from the market, watching the Iron Man was a trip highlight for me, the culture of Arts et Metiers is fascinating, the food is delicious, and its history is extensive. I'll be sad to say goodbye.

# Verdon Gorge

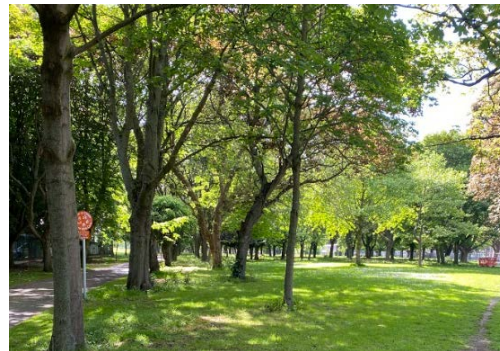
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Verdon Gorge may have been my favorite trip within France that we took. Hiking in Moustiers Sainte Marie was some of the first hiking I did in France and I couldn't get the smile off my face the whole time. Kayaking in the gorge and swimming in the water was refreshing. Cities are great and all, but I prefer nature, and this was my first taste of a true natural park in Europe. It began the trend of my favorite events being those surrounded by rocks, plants, and wildlife.

# Ireland

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For our first weekend trip, I went to Ireland. I had always heard it called the emerald isle, but I was still struck by the intense green everywhere, even in Dublin. My favorite parts were my solo walks around town. I'd get out of the tourist areas and just wander around and see the locals. The top right picture is just a spot from a park with soccer fields and a couple trails, but it was a nice change of pace after the stone French cities. This trip also made me more confident that I would like to be a structural engineer. The bridge in the bottom right is beautiful. It's a marvel of architecture and structural engineering. I would love nothing more than to work on something like that someday.



# Mont Sainte-Victoire

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On the Sunday before the Gala, me and some others were going to climb Mont Sainte-Victoire. Unfortunately, I was the only one who wound up going, but it is now one of my most treasured stories. From making friends with a German man named Tobias, to the Texans I met on the trail, to the gorgeous scenery and history that surrounded me. I couldn't be more glad that I decided to persevere even if it meant going solo. I became more confident in myself, and had the chance to hike however long I wanted, at any pace. By the end, my legs were cramping, I was exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and hot. It was a feeling I wouldn't trade for the world.

# Switzerland

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Switzerland was, far and above, my favorite part of the trip. I could make an entire presentation on this weekend trip. From the sights seen, experiences had, and friends made, it was perfect. I will content myself, however with saying that the picture in the top right displays me at one of the happiest, most content moments of my life. Surrounded by friends, the Alps, and singing Swiss men, eating sausage and potatoes, and drinking mulled wine. It was incredible.