

Naomi Jacob
COM 395
Professor Hartley
June 30, 2024

Post Trip Reflection

My time abroad in France has been a whirlwind of an experience filled with many opportunities for growth, learning, and self-discovery. From the city life of Paris to the meta of Cannes, each moment was a perfect blend of excitement and nervousness. When I first arrived in France, I had a mixture of preconceived notions about French culture. I anticipated seeing high fashion, beautiful and historic art, and authentic cuisine. Paris did not disappoint. I was blown away by how beautifully intricate the city was in real life. For instance, from the Gothic magnificence of Notre Dame (even though you could barely see it) to the iconic Eiffel Tower illuminated at night, was breathtaking. Also, during our visit to Notre Dame, I learned (and presented) about the restoration efforts following the devastating fire in 2019

While there were many enjoyable moments, being abroad also came with challenges. Navigating a foreign country where I was not fluent in the language was initially worrying. Ordering food and even simple interactions required more effort and patience. For instance, dining in local restaurants where only French was spoken challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and practice my language skills. There were moments of frustration, especially in restaurants where the menus were entirely in French, and I had to rely on my limited vocabulary and Google Translate.

I also discovered aspects of French culture that were unexpected; the relaxed pace of life, especially during meals, contrasted sharply with the fast-paced American lifestyle I was accustomed to. But I have no complaints here; I loved hanging out with my new friends and enjoying each other's company. Another challenge was adapting to the metro in Paris. Thank God for Meg Higgins, or I would have still been stuck there; I just could not figure out what the signs meant, which way they were going, and followed everyone like a lamb everywhere I was led.

There were countless enjoyable moments during my time in France. One of the highlights was visiting Monet's house and garden in Giverny. Walking through the beautiful gardens and seeing the inspiration for his paintings firsthand was a dream come true. I had no idea he painted "The Great Wave." Seeing it in person was shocking, mainly because I didn't expect it. Also, they genuinely have fantastic cider. The Palace of Versailles was another unforgettable experience. The palace's luxury and its gardens' intricacies left me wondering about France's rich history and eternal grandeur.

Cannes offered a different yet equally fascinating experience. The city's glamorous reputation was evident in its blue beaches, luxury shops, and the famous Cannes Film Festival atmosphere. At Cannes, I was fascinated by the buzz created by the film festival. I learned that brands like CeraVe, my favorite marketing strategy of the festival, have successfully leveraged this event for viral marketing, such as the "Micheal CeraVe" exhibition, which significantly boosted their audience growth after leveraging an accidental conspiracy about Micheal Cera

having of created CeraVe. These hits enriched my understanding of how cultural events can influence marketing strategies.

My time in France led to significant self-discovery. Immersed in a different culture, I gained new insights into my cultural identity and values. For example, I realized how much I value the efficiency and convenience of American life when I am in a hurry, but I also learned to appreciate the French emphasis on quality of life and taking the time to savor experiences. This duality has given me a more balanced perspective on what it means to live well. Working with my peers during the trip was another area of growth. We supported each other through different challenges, from navigating Paris's metro system to collaborating on group projects, even photobombing each other's vlogs. One memorable experience was attending a session on creative commitment at Cannes. The emphasis on embracing discomfort and practicing empathy resonated deeply with me. This lesson was particularly relevant when our team had to work through misunderstandings and differences in opinions.

This experience has greatly shifted my mindset and future goals. Being abroad has broadened my horizons and made me more open to exploring opportunities outside my comfort zone. It has also sparked an interest in international relations and global marketing, areas I had yet to consider but got to hear about at the festival. I already cannot wait to study abroad again next summer, even if it is just a sliver of how amazing this trip was,

When I return to the University of Alabama next semester, I plan to carry forward the lessons learned from my time in France. I will approach my studies with a renewed perspective,

incorporating the French appreciation for art, culture, and quality of life into my academic and personal pursuits. From now on, every project will likely be something about France. I also aim to engage more actively in UA events and programs on campus to continue expanding the way I think.