FRAÎCHEMENT PARISIENNE

THE LATEST NEWS, ADVENTURES AND MUSINGS FROM PARIS CORRESPONDENT MELISSA LESLIE, WHO RECENTLY LEFT SYDNEY FOR THE CITY OF LIGHT TO DISCOVER HOW LES VOYAGES FORMENT LA Jeunesse...

NEWLY PARISIAN

The question people have asked me here almost daily is one I never really expected: "Pourquoi Paris?" To me, it seems a given, and there are so many reasons that I often struggle to explain. Parisians declare they'd gladly trade for my bushy Bonni bushchis - and sun-kissed runs across the Harbour Bridge. They're even more perplexed when I reveal I'm not only vegetarian, but allergic to cheese and most other dairy products. "Mince! Mo passer!" The pity flows like fondui. But it hardly ever comes to me that I'm missing anything.

Once I rat off the obvious about exquisite architecture, history, culture and charm per square metre (and assure everyone that Parisians have been really rather nice to me), I prepare for the inevitable follow-up: "And is Paris what you hoped it would be?" Again, out, paws sans dire.

But just as the scaffolding of Iwakua can be seen climbing all over the elegant buildings, my personal Paris is still under construction - the monuments that lure me here are just the backdrops for the formation of local rituals. That means running every Saturday morning to the bustling, organic markets on Boulevard Raspail, where Juliette Binoche and Catherine Deneuve can be spied under silk shawls and sunglasses. If I lose track of what day it is, I know Wednesday is the only day my boulangerie prepares its succulent pain au cacao, and if I've run out, it must be Friday.

The rest of my Paris rituals revolve around concerts, new friends, new phrases, the potted omelette and wine on my windowsill, unruly youths who play French rap on their boombox beneath my window (I sometimes descend so we can race our bikes to the Eiffel Tower), and other simple pleasures. If it all sounds a little superficial, watch this space in three months, perhaps I'll have some deeper insights, hopefully not of the Creole Down and Out variety...

AN ORIENTAL JEWEL

It might seem odd to get all goopy about a Parisian hotel that feels anything but Parisian, but that is the case with the exotic and distinctly oriental Hotel Daniel. Hidden in a quiet street just off the Champs Elysees in the eight, Hotel Daniel is one of Paris's newest boutique hotels.

Why do we love it? Because it inspires dreams of far away places, of the bohemian lifestyle of a Paris gone by, and of the freedom and passion evoked by global travel.

As soon as you walk into this hotel - which looks decidedly Parisian from the outside - you get a sense that you're anywhere but a stone's throw from the Arc de Triomphe. Interior designer Tats Saito made sure of that, enriching the décor with Kazachstan carpets, Turkish silver, Chinese calligraphy and a range of furnishings that scream oriental boudoir.

Being a boutique hotel, the rooms are small but adequately luxurious with enormous bathtubs and showerheads to be enjoyed whilst overlooking those oh-so-famous black slate roofs of Paris.

One of the most curious - and fun - things about this hotel is the array of Toile de Jouy that adorns the walls of each unique room, intended to inspire adventure and dreams of the Silk Road. The Chinonerie includes depictions of Voyage en Chine by Pierre Frey, Samby by Manuel Canovas, and Voyage de Marco Polo by Schumacher.

It's not all about the East, with some French motifs making an appearance too, including Paris de Venise and Paris de Bruxelles of the 18th and 18th by Zoffany.

If you've been on a trip to the Eastern theme, you're craving some Asian fare after a few weeks of delicious but exhaustingly rich French dinners, there are a few fantastic Vietnamese and Chinese restaurants in the vicinity. Ask at reception and they'll give you the good oint.

This really is a fabulous little hotel in a great spot - and one that offers something a little different to the discerning traveller.

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