



APRIL 2017 BUNNY DAY

“Yes! Easter is soon.” Responded the Parisian sales woman helping us with our purchases. She was listening for English and thought we were referring to the upcoming holiday. My friend was in fact saying “bonne idée” or “good idea” in French. This struck me. This was a different city than the Paris of my college years. Then, speaking fluent French and looking so American, I was privy to many French conversations. The very last thing they were trying to do was to listen for English. Nor would they frequent a chain like Starbucks when there were cafés on every corner. They smoked. They were noticeably thinner. The only fast food establishment was a McDonalds on the Champs Elysées and it served beer and wine. Fortunately, the French are still more dignified diners than we are. When they do sit down regardless of whether it is at home or in are restaurant, they still take their time and pay attention to their companions and to the presentation of the food. Multi-tasking while eating still hasn’t officially crossed the pond.

BREAKFAST

Breakfast is relatively unchanged. It consists of a “tartine” (about a third of a baguette spread with butter and served with jam) and café crème. This is the only time of day when bread is served with butter and coffee is served with milk. Croissants are sold fresh everyday but they are more of a treat than standard breakfast fare. In restaurants, where croissants are served, there is also the option of adding freshly squeezed orange juice and fried eggs or omelets. Eggs come three at a time and omelets are much simpler – perhaps with some herb seasoning but not much else. Bagel shops have popped up, but I didn’t see much noshing.



LUNCH

Lunch used to be the main meal of the day but appears to have morphed into something more on-the-fly. Businesses used to close for the midday meal. Workers and students would go home to dine with their families. Today, companies are providing vouchers for workers to dine in nearby restaurants or cafeterias. Lunch typically consists of a starter, an entrée and cheese or dessert followed by coffee. Most diners drink water or Perrier, but there were a few sightings of Coke Zero. Diet soda was unheard of back in the day. College students were often seen roaming the streets with baguette jambon, a simple ham sandwich, and today this practice is not age or campus specific, it is everywhere. McDonalds has spread from the single Champs Elysées location to every neighborhood and suburb. Despite the Americanization of Paris, the French manage to take their time eating. According to the one study I found, the French average 22 minutes consuming a hamburger, whereas Americans clock in at just under 11 minutes.





SNACK

Every day after school, French students have a snack called goûter. It was a chocolate sandwich— a piece of dark chocolate thrown into a baguette. Adults joined in by drinking tea and eating a few cookies or small pieces of toast. This is still common practice but more likely is a chocolate croissant eaten while walking home instead of a mini meal eaten at the table.



DINNER

Dinner has become heavier and is now the main meal shared by families. Whereas it used to be a smaller version of or leftovers from the midday meal, it now resembles more of what we would eat. Dinner is served in courses - starter, entrée, cheese and dessert-- and wine is the beverage of choice. Bread is used to push food onto to the fork and to clean up any sauce left on the plate. Dessert is fruit based, with pastries only served on special occasions. After dinner, the kitchen is closed.



There are definitely more supermarkets and pre-made foods than there were, but happily all of the streets are still lined with small bakeries and pastry shops, butchers, and green grocers. It was tougher to find a tripe store. That was not much of a loss as far as we were concerned.

Regardless of where we shopped or dined, it was very hard to find a bad glass of wine or a tasteless piece of bread in France. It was hard to grab a fast meal too. Mostly because the bread is really hard to chew and requires complete concentration. And while the food landscape has evolved to a more Americanized version of what it once was, the people have changed too. From what I could tell, they like having us around better now.



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