

A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

Volume IV



Praise for *A Child's Geography: Explore Medieval Kingdoms...*

My eleven year old daughter and I were delighted to read through A Child's Geography: Medieval Kingdoms. We both learned so very much! Reading this book really ignites the imagination and helps you feel like you are THERE, walking through the streets of the country being studied, tasting the local foods, and meeting new friends. My daughter was so interested in what we were reading that she begged to finish the book in one day! I am a trained classroom teacher that has been homeschooling for the past 18 years, and I would definitely place the Child's Geography books up there with the very best resources—ones you and your child will return to over and over again. ~ Susan Menzmer

This was my first time reading any books in the A Child's Geography series and it will now be our new curriculum for geography as well as history. Beautifully written. The story pulls you in and allows you to fully immerse yourself in the places, sights, sounds, and scents of our world. The photographs are wonderful; beautiful, bright, and full of color. The book title says geography, but it is so much more. There is history and not boring text book history either. It's edge of your seat history that you, as well as your children, will enjoy. I have learned so much and I am excited to get the whole collection to begin our journey around the world! ~ Stephanie Sanchez

I really enjoyed getting some more indepth research about several areas that I have visited in person, either as a child or an adult. As always, Terri's knowledge is accessible to children and their parents alike so we can all learn together! ~ Meredith Boone

This book allows kids to not only learn geography and history, but to see where it is happening. History and geography should not be separate, they make sense to be placed together. ~ Laura Strombaugh

A Child's Geography: Explore Medieval Kingdoms is so vivid, it is the next best thing to being there! What a wonderful way to experience geography! Cuddle on the sofa with children at your feet traveling to foreign lands and times gone by. ~ Cindy Morgan

Awesome! I am hooked on the book and on Medieval Times! (and I am not a history buff!) ~ Ginette Martin

*First I want to say I greatly enjoyed your writing style. I loved feeling like I was traveling through Western Europe: food, sights, and sounds! It reminded me of *Longing for Paris* by Sarah Mae. I can't wait to read some of your other books and share them with my children when they get a little older. ~ Beth Robinson*

I love the content and the conversational tone. Great information. You have a nice balance of history, geography, food, and just what it is like to travel. I can't wait to see the book with the pictures and maps! ~ Cheri Stamile

I absolutely LOVE it! The style of writing is so exciting, and really gives life to history...not just a stack of facts and dates. ~ Marilyn Brasuell

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Table of Contents

Map of Medieval Kingdoms.....	4
Introduction	6
A Few Thoughts Before Embarking.....	7
Chapter 1, Spain, Pt I.....	9
Chapter 2, Spain, Pt II	25
Chapter 3, Portugal.....	38
Chapter 4, Tiny Kingdoms, Pt I.....	53
Chapter 5, France, Pt I.....	65
Chapter 6, France, Pt II.....	79
Chapter 7, France, Pt III	94
Chapter 8, France, Pt IV.....	111
Chapter 9, Switzerland	131
Chapter 10, Austria.....	143
Chapter 11, Germany, Pt I.....	157
Chapter 12, Germany, Pt II.....	173
Chapter 13, Tiny Kingdoms, Pt II	189
Chapter 14, Belgium	203
Chapter 15, the Netherlands	217
Glossary	231

Timelines, Map Work, Activities, Recipes, Prayer Guide and more can be found on the download page listed in the Introduction.





A Child's Geography: Explore Medieval Kingdoms

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Introduction

After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD, the Classical World plunged into darkness. Although the sun did not literally disappear from the sky, nor the stars fade from view, the world did change in ways that historians would describe as “dark.”

The time of leisure and the pursuit of recreational activities had come to a screeching halt. No longer did people have time to pursue education and scholarship, architectural advancements, or political debate. More pressing matters needed their attention. The people of the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe were now focused on sheer survival, as they were living day to day amid warring tribes, led by powerful **barbarian** warlords.

During these “dark ages,” city dwellers stopped building large and beautiful buildings; they stopped developing democratic systems of government; and they stopped writing books and music. This lack of growth and production is what made the dark ages so dark. Can you imagine a world without books or music? Neither can I!

The Dark Ages lasted for nearly 400 years. That is a long time! If you think about it, the United States has only been a nation for a little more than 225 years. In fact, the pilgrims set foot on this soil and established Plymouth Plantation about 400 years ago. So 400 years is a long time!

But the Dark Ages didn’t last forever and western societies eased into a time known as the Middle Ages (or Medieval time period). The “middle” of what, you ask? Well, the Middle Ages were the middle years between the Classical World of the Greeks and Romans and the Renaissance, which means “re-birth.” The age of the Renaissance received its name because society was finally “reborn” around the 15th century, nearly one thousand years after the Fall of Rome. The Renaissance ushered in a time of great rediscovery of the fine arts, of towering architecture, of political unrest, and of classical literature.

As we continue our explorations around God’s glorious globe, we will pick up where we left off. Leaving the Classical World behind, we’ll discover the medieval realm of the barbarians—the **Franks**, the **Visigoths**, the **Burgundians**, and others—by visiting the swiftly changing countries of Western Europe. We’ll charge into the heart of this old world, some areas still more medieval than modern in many ways.

This journey is going to be quite an adventure!

We left our flying carpet behind after the second volume of *A Child's Geography* and our scrolls after volume three. Let's don our tunics and strap on our swords as we venture into new territory, which includes Spain, Portugal, France, Andorra, Monaco, Switzerland, Austria, Liechtenstein, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands. I cannot wait to see what we will find there, and who we will meet!

Are you ready to go? I am! Come! Let's explore medieval kingdoms and the modern-day countries of Western Europe.

A Few Thoughts Before Embarking...

This book is a stand-alone book and can be read straight through without any additional resources. We have provided pronunciation and glossary assistance, along with photos and maps to help you get everything you need out of this volume. However, there are a few things that you should know...

1. This is Volume IV of *A Child's Geography*. Three volumes precede it—*A Child's Geography: Explore His Earth*, *A Child's Geography: Explore the Holy Land*, and *A Child's Geography: Explore the Classical World*. These books do not need to be read in order, but they do complement each other nicely. Ann Voskamp, Best-selling author of *One Thousand Gifts*, wrote the first two volumes. She set the stage for a great series of books that teach history and geography using a “living book” approach that engages the reader while bringing greater understanding and appreciation for distant corners of our globe. *Explore His Earth* lays a foundation for geography by covering earth science topics such as components of our planet, layers of the atmosphere, continents and seas, tectonic plates, earthquakes, volcanoes, latitude, longitude and so much more. *Explore the Holy Land* dives straight down into the Middle East, exploring the beautiful countryside and bringing greater understanding for the cultures and people who live there.

2. Volumes II and III are the perfect companions to an ancient history study. This volume, volume IV, is an ideal complement to medieval history. *A Child's Geography* series is a wonderful way to study history and geography together in a seamless way.

3. A single volume of *A Child's Geography* can be studied over the course of a semester or an entire year. If you plan to use only one book this year, then aim to cover one chapter every two weeks. The first week, you can read the chapter and discuss the narration questions. The second week, you and your students can work on additional projects, such as writing in your journals, keeping a timeline, labeling maps, doing extra reading and tackling some fun projects, especially (I hope!) cooking up some of the recipes provided. If you would prefer to finish the book in half the time—one semester—then

plan on spending one week on each chapter, reading the content and choosing one or two additional activities per country.

4. Words in **bold** type indicate vocabulary words, which are defined in the glossary in the back of the book. If your student is unfamiliar with the word, use your reading time in this book to expand his/her vocabulary.

4. The extra activities are located on a special download page on our website. There, you will find timelines for each chapter, map labeling suggestions, hands-on activities (including authentic recipes), extra reading suggestions, and more.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/dev/acg4-extras-dnld/>

5. *A Child's Geography* series is intended for students in 1st through 6th grades, but it can work equally well with middle school students. Feel free to adjust the activities and assignments according to your student's grade level and/or maturity level.

6. This book is your book and you are the teacher. Please use this book, along with its many optional activities, as you see fit. We hoped to provide you with MORE than you need or want to do. That way, you can pick and choose what works best for your family or group of students. Our goal is to equip you with resources, not shackle you to a pile of extra work.

If you have any questions or comments, please send them to me at terri@knowledgequestmaps.com. I would love to discuss them with you. Oh, that reminds me... yes, I, Terri Johnson, am the author of this book. While Ann Voskamp began the series several years ago, she is unable to continue it at this point in her life. I hope that I have been able to do this volume justice, following on her heels, and trying to fit into her awfully large shoes (no, her feet aren't big, but her reputation as an extremely gifted author is great indeed). Any mistakes that you find are mine alone. Anything that you love about the series concept can be credited to Ann.

I hope that you enjoy this fascinating journey around the countries of Western Europe. I cannot wait to explore these places with you. It will be like we're traveling there without leaving the comfort of our own homes. Together, we will embrace new cultures and appreciate people different from ourselves. It will be an adventure we will not soon forget. Do you have your map ready, your bag packed, and your shoes laced? Great. Let's go!



P.S. Be sure to head to the web link above for all of the fun bonuses that come with this book. So fun!

I Spain, Pt I

Moor Land in Spain

Across the scorching North African sands, the **Moors**, with their black capes billowing behind them, raced on horseback to Hispania, a new land full of hope and promise for the future. Ah, Hispania... the land of abundance, overflowing with green olives and purple grapes, ripe for the picking.

After the death of Mohammed in AD 632, the Muslims of Arabia began to expand their territory rapidly. They spread across northern Africa and settled in the land of Morocco, in the very north-west corner of the African continent. Do you have your travel map handy? Pull it out and see if you can find Morocco. It was here that this group of people became known as the Moors. While Morocco was a pleasant rest stop for the Moors, it was not their final destination. They had set their sights on conquering the barbarian tribe known as the Visigoths and settling the Iberian **Peninsula**, which is the region we know as modern Spain and Portugal.



Iberian Peninsula map by Robert Wilkerson, public domain image.

The Moors crossed the narrow **Strait** of Gibraltar on ships, bringing their horses with them. The Strait of Gibraltar is a waterway fifteen miles wide that separates the continents of Africa and Europe. (A **strait** of water isn't necessarily straight, without bends or curves. The word strait has nothing to do with "straight" lines. A strait is a narrow channel of water that connects two larger bodies of water.) On the Spanish side of the strait is the mighty



The Rock of Gibraltar, ThinkStock photos, used with permission.

monolithic limestone outcropping known as the Rock of Gibraltar. The ancient peoples of Greece and Rome referred to this rock as one of the Pillars of **Hercules** (the other and smaller one being Jebel Musa—or Mount Moses—on the African side of the strait). These Pillars marked the boundaries of the known world. What lay beyond was anyone's guess.

After the Moors crossed the strait, it took about eight years for them to conquer the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. The Moors loved their new land, but they were not content. Moorish raiders on horseback, with **scimitars** glinting in the hot Spanish sunlight, continued to move north over the next several decades, winning more and more land until they could go no further. They crossed the Pyrenees Mountains and made significant inroads into modern-day France before a legion of Frankish and Burgundian warriors, led by Charles Martel, stopped their advance at the Battle of Tours in AD 732.

Let's drop into Spain at the same location that the Moors did... at the Rock of Gibraltar. The Rock, and the surrounding area known as Gibraltar, are the property of the United Kingdom and not owned by Spain at all. But it is the southern entrance to Spain and a great place to start our adventure.

We need to have our maps out because as we pass through the UK territory of Gibraltar, we find ourselves in the southern region of Spain known as Andalucía. Andalucía is perhaps the most iconic part

of Spain because it typifies the very things we think of when we think of Spain—bullfights, horses, and flamenco dancing! In fact, the town of Ronda in the very south of Spain has the oldest bullfighting arena in the country, the Plaza de Toros de Ronda.

Terrifying hairpin turns and a steep mountain incline transport us into Ronda, a town built along the extreme edge of a sheer cliff face overlooking a deep gorge below. The village, with its dizzyingly tall, narrow bridge, is so lofty in altitude that it is often enveloped in rain-heavy clouds.

There is no bullfight scheduled for today, but it is fun to imagine one in this historic arena. The sport of bullfighting dates back to Ancient Greek and Roman times when many Man vs. beast competitions were held in the Colosseum and other arenas of the Classical World. Spain is not the only country that hosts bullfights in modern times, but when we think of bullfighting, we certainly think of Spain. Other countries that host bullfights are France and Portugal (both of which border Spain as you can see by looking at your map); Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela across the world in South America; and the Philippine Islands in the Pacific Ocean, southwest of Japan. Bullfighting was brought to these regions by the Spanish, who colonized these regions around the world.

The people who fight bulls are called “toreros.” You have probably heard of the more familiar term “matador” but this word only refers to the most senior torero. Finely dressed toreros must execute a series of choreographed moves, almost like a dance, waving a fiery red cape to entice the bull to charge it. Toreros must be very careful because there is great danger when they face the bulls in the bullring. The bulls can get very angry during the bullfight and their horns are very sharp, so the toreros must pay close attention and always be alert. And quick on their feet!



Bullfighting in Spain, ThinkStock photos, licensed for publication.

We'll continue our explorations of Spain in the city of Seville, the capital and largest city in Andalucía. Although not directly on the coast, Seville has a long history with deep seafaring roots. The Phoenicians originally colonized Seville over 2,200 years ago before it became a Roman **outpost**. In 1519, Ferdinand Magellan departed from Seville to complete the first **circumnavigation** of the globe. Spain also commissioned the Italian sea captain, Christopher Columbus, to sail to the New World. He departed from Palos, Seville's closest seaport. This is the reason his remains were given to this Spanish city and his tomb can be viewed inside the great doors of the **Cathedral** of Seville.

Mysteriously, the city of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic also claims to possess the bones of Christopher Columbus. Although Columbus died in Spain, his skeletal remains were carried to Hispaniola—modern-day Dominican Republic—in 1537. In 1795, they were moved to Cuba, and later returned to Seville, Spain in 1898.



However, the journey may not have ended there, and this is where the mystery lies. Back in the Dominican Republic at the Cathedral of Santa María la Menor, a worker discovered a heavy leaden box marked “The illustrious and excellent man, Don Colón, Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” (Colón is the Spanish name for Columbus.) The implication of this find is that the Spanish may have taken the wrong man's bones back to Seville. Christopher Columbus' son was also named Don Colón, so it is possible that one of the sets of bones belongs to him. Or they may belong to someone else entirely. DNA testing has not proven the identity of either set of bones. And so, for this reason, each of these countries straddling the Atlantic Ocean proudly display *the* tomb of Columbus and dispute the other's claim to possess his illustrious remains. The 500-year-old mystery remains unsolved.

In modern times, Seville has become the center of flamenco music and dancing. Flamenco is a type of Spanish folk music

and dance. The unique dance style was born right here in the province of Andalucía. Today, we have the opportunity to see a flamenco performance at the theater. Flamenco is a combination of singing, guitar playing, hand clapping, and dancing. Let's hurry so that we don't miss any of it!

The audience loves the lively music, the colorful costumes, and the beautiful dancing. They show their appreciation by clapping and shouting their approval. I'll be quiet now so that you can enjoy the performance yourself:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-spain-ch1-2/>



Flamenco dancer, ThinkStock photos, licensed for publication.

What did you think of the flamenco performance? Isn't the footwork for flamenco dancing fast and intricate? It takes a great deal of practice to move your feet that quickly.

It's time to jostle our way through the crowds to the train station. The train will be here any minute and it is sure to be on time, because if it's late, passengers ride free. Spain has the best train system in Europe. The trains are extremely reliable and incredibly fast, reaching speeds of 220 miles per hour. They are also very comfortable and luxurious, especially the hotel-trains, which are Spain's "hotels on wheels." This clean and plush rail car makes us feel like royalty. Isn't it great that the windows are



Alhambra Citadel photo by Jiuguang Wang, public domain CC BY-SA 3.0.

so large? We can watch the scenery as we speed through the Spanish countryside with a short stop in Granada before we take a longer ride up north to Barcelona.

The view outside our window is spectacular as we zip east through green valleys and up into the **foothills** of Granada. The town lies at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Granada is best known for The Alhambra, a Moorish citadel and palace built in AD 889. I'm looking forward to exploring it with you.

Moorish poets described The Alhambra as a “pearl set in emeralds.” This description compares the color of the buildings to the color of pearls and the lush green woods surrounding the fortress to emeralds. The palace complex was designed with the foothill setting in mind. There is a park surrounding the citadel, which was planted by the Moors. Within the park are groves of orange and myrtle trees with rose bushes of many colors and varieties. Its most characteristic feature, however, was not planted by the Moors, but by the English. There is a dense wood of English elms that were brought here by the Duke of Wellington in 1812.

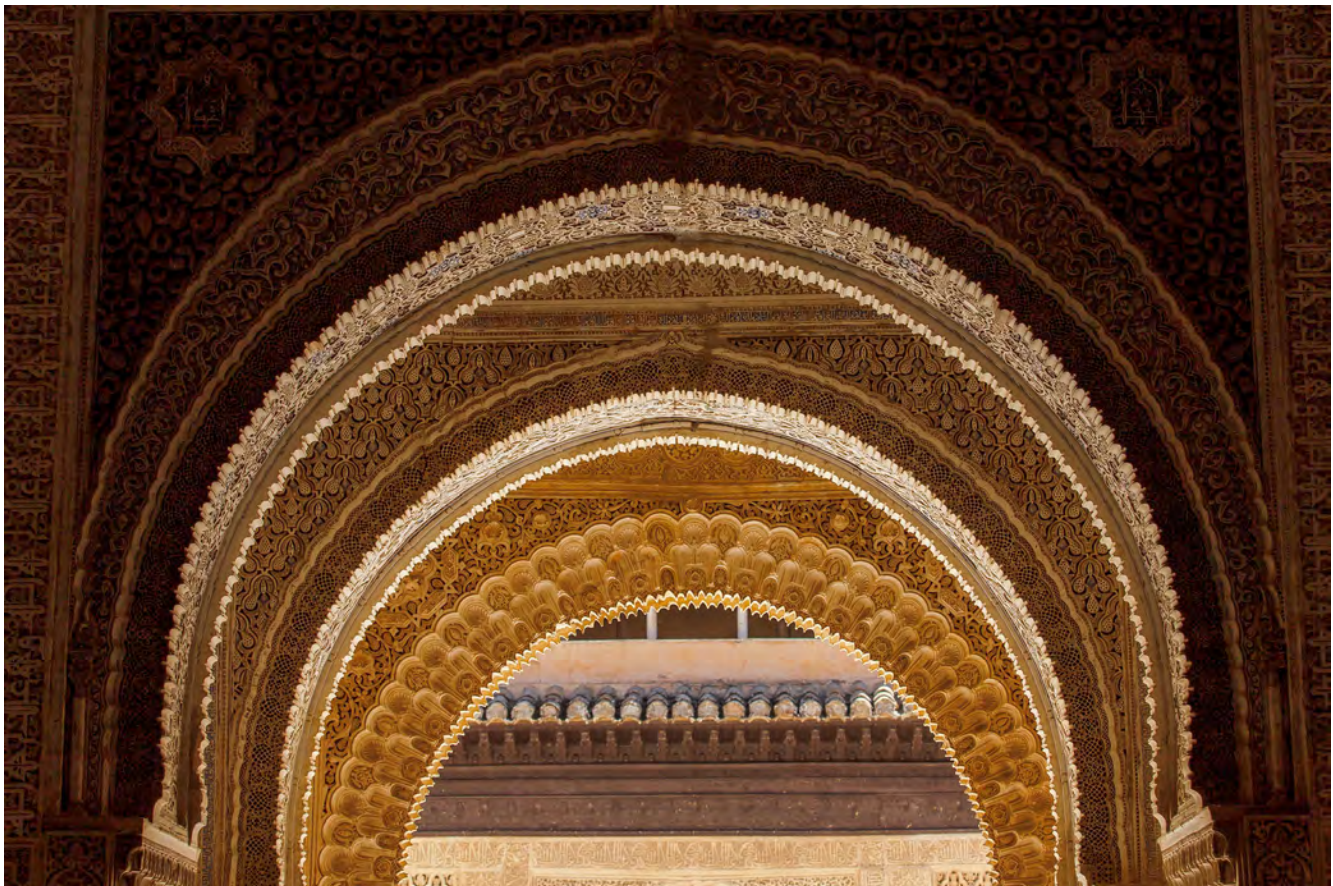
Do you hear that? That is the beautiful song of the nightingale. Bird songs and trills, along with the swishing sound of water cascading over falls and fountains, make the park a tranquil place to enjoy the beauty of this area.

Explore Medieval Kingdoms

Let's go inside and look around. This impressive fortress and the town of Granada were the last hold-outs of the Moors in Spain. The year 1492 holds great significance for the people of Spain and every year they celebrate an event that happened that year. And no, it has nothing to do with Columbus sailing the ocean blue. Spaniards celebrate 1492 because that is the year that the Moors were finally driven out of Spain after 800 years of domination. They celebrate the "Reconquista," or re-conquest, of this land by the Spanish Christians. On January 2, 1492, Emir Muhammad XII surrendered Granada after 600 years of occupation to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella after his defeat in the Granada War.

That is why you can see both Muslim and medieval Christian influence throughout the halls and rooms of the magnificent Alhambra. It is a beautiful, jaw-dropping palace that tells a long and complicated story. Be sure to take many photos to send back home. In fact, let's write a postcard home and tell them about our favorite thing we have learned so far here in Spain.

But not yet! It's time to hurry back to the train. Our "hotel on wheels" departs in an hour and we do not want to miss it. We'll write our postcards while we ride the rails north. Next stop, Barcelona!



Alhambra Citadel photo by SuperCar-RoadTrip.fr, public domain CC BY-SA 3.0.

But first, tell me what you remember about...

The Moors:

What do you remember about Morocco? Did the Moors end up staying there? They had to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar on their quest to conquer Spain. Do you remember the names of the pillars that stood on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, marking it as the boundary of the known world for ancient peoples?

Spain:

Why do the people of Spain celebrate the year 1492? Here is a hint—it does not have anything to do with Christopher Columbus!

Tell me what you think about our trip through Spain. What sights and sounds do you remember? Can you name some of the places we visited? Would you rather see a bullfight or a flamenco dance and why?

Why is the Alhambra called “a pearl set in emeralds”? What two cultures are reflected in this beautiful palace and why?



Balmy Barcelona to Majestic Montserrat

It is quite an experience to travel by hotel-train up to Barcelona and one I think you will enjoy. We can settle in and get comfortable because we will not arrive in Barcelona until early tomorrow morning. We have a sleeper car to ourselves, but the beds fold into couches when we don't want to sleep. The big windows provide a magnificent view of the scenery outside.

While we zip north through the heart of Spain, let me give you some more information about the lay of the land. Spain takes up most of the Iberian Peninsula, along with Portugal and Andorra, which are smaller countries we'll learn about later. Spain is bigger than the state of California in the United States. It is the second largest country in Europe, right after France.

Spain is a mountainous country. The Pyrenees Mountains form its northern border with France. Other mountain chains and many high **plateaus** spread throughout the rest of the peninsula. However, the highest mountain in Spain is not found on the Iberian Peninsula at all. Mt. Teide is located on the island of Tenerife, one of the seven Canary Islands that belong to Spain, which are located in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa. Mt. Teide is an active volcano and the third largest volcano in the world.

The nation of Spain includes another set of islands too—the Balearic Islands—which are located on the other side of Spain near the Mediterranean Sea. And if that weren't enough, Spain's holdings in-



Spanish high speed trains, ThinkStock photos, licensed for publication.

clude two more areas—the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, enclaves located on the Mediterranean coast of Africa bordering Morocco. Do you remember what an **enclave** is? An enclave is a country, or portion of a country, that is entirely surrounded by another country. You can see these two cities on your map.

Running right through the heart of Spain is the Tajo River. In fact, there are several large rivers, including the Ebro, the Duero, the Guadalquivir, and the Guadiana, that crisscross Spain bringing water and nourishment to the semi-arid land in the south. Because of this, Spanish farmers can grow an abundance of citrus fruit, such as oranges, grapefruit, lemons, and limes. Like most countries that surround the Mediterranean Sea, Spain also grows olives and grapes in abundance.

Because Spain is so close to Africa, the wildlife is very diverse. We will see plenty of chameleons, lizards, and snakes during our stay here in Spain, but we might also spot a brown bear or a red deer. We may even see some creatures that are less familiar to us, such as ibex and mongoose. Let's keep a lookout for them before the sun goes down and our view of the world from our train window disappears.

It's time to prepare our train car and ourselves for sleep. When we wake up, we'll be in the beautiful seaside city of Barcelona. Night-night!



Guell Park, Barcelona, Adobe Stock Photos, licensed for publication.

Good morning! We have arrived in Barcelona and it is a beautiful, sunny day here on the Mediterranean coast. We couldn't have asked for a nicer day to wander through this lively and colorful city, the capital of Catalonia. Just like Andalucía, Catalonia is a geographical region of Spain. But the Catalans do not consider Catalonia a region; to them it is a nation that isn't officially recognized as one.

The people of Catalonia speak their own language—Catalan—in addition to Spanish. There are two additional languages spoken in regional parts of Spain—Galician and Basque—for a total of four languages spoken in this country.

Barcelona is the second largest city in Spain, after Madrid, with 4.7 million people calling it home. Barcelona has a rich and diverse history. It was founded over 2,000 years ago as a Roman colony. Later, it became the Visigoth capital during the Dark Ages and then a 14th century **maritime** super-power.

Let's stroll along the Ramblas first, since this avenue is the center of old Barcelona. Cafés and eateries line the street, so we are sure to find something delicious for breakfast. How about a bagel with eggs and ham, and maybe some coffee or hot chocolate to drink? Hot chocolate is a specialty beverage of Spain and is quite different from the hot chocolate served in other countries. The warm drink is thick,

dark, and sweet, traditionally served with fried-dough sticks, called churros. Perfect. If we sit by a window or out on the sidewalk, we can watch the many street performers that parade up and down the boulevard.

At the far end of the Ramblas is the Columbus **monument**, for it was here that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain welcomed Christopher Columbus home after his first voyage to the New World. It is ironic that Barcelona should honor the man whose discoveries opened up new trade routes in the Atlantic Ocean, because this shifted the focus of European trade away from the powerful and wealthy trading ports on the Mediterranean, including Barcelona. Barcelona plunged into an economic decline during that transition, but today it is a bustling and exciting city.

Beyond the monument is the waterfront, which was completely renovated for the 1992 Summer Olympic Games that were hosted by Spain in Barcelona. Sand was trucked in to provide beaches for the great numbers of people that swarmed Barcelona to watch the Olympics. Promenades were constructed along those man-made beaches and cafés built along the promenades. Barcelona has become a lovely beach town.

We must visit the Gothic Quarter next. There, in the heart of old Barcelona is the Picasso Museum. Have you ever seen the artwork of Pablo Picasso? If you have, then you will be surprised by what you will discover here. Barcelona is the town of Picasso's youth and it has the largest collection of his early artwork anywhere.



Barcelona beach taken by Mislav Marohnić, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

When you see the realistic art of Picasso's youth, you will have a greater appreciation for his later, more abstract art. The museum collection takes you back to his earliest works, which are very detailed and thoughtful. Even as a child and early teen, his portraits show impressive technique and insight into the emotions of his subjects. Often, his family members made appearances in his artwork, usually his father, appearing as a teacher, doctor, or priest.

As a child, Pablo Picasso painted like an adult. When he became an adult, he said that he learned to paint like a child—not painting what he saw, but what he felt.



Science and Charity by Pablo Picasso (1897) and A Rooster by Pablo Picasso (1938).

Beyond the Gothic Quarter and outside the dense Old City of Barcelona, we can visit the Eixample (pronounced [é-sham-pla] meaning “expansion”) district. The 19th century was a boom time for Barcelona. By 1850, the city was bursting out of its medieval walls, and so an expansion was planned to grow the city. Wide sidewalks, tree-lined boulevards and spacious squares were all thoughtfully planned and carried out for the Eixample district.

The vision for the Eixample was to allow everyone to be equal and have equal access to all amenities. Each district of twenty square blocks would have its own markets, hospitals, parks, schools, and day-care centers. However, the wealthy residents of the city turned this area into an architectural showcase to flaunt their wealth to their neighbors.

The wealthy citizens of Barcelona embraced Modernisme, the Catalan version of the Art Nouveau style, which was becoming popular throughout Europe in the late 19th century. Barcelona became the



Passieg de Gràcia taken by Mstyslav Chernov, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

capital of Modernisme, and you can see it everywhere in this Doctor Seuss-like section of town. The buildings are not square and angular, but rounded with flowery and flowing asymmetrical shapes.

Take a look at the mansions along the boulevard Passeig de Gràcia [pass-àge-de-gra-sia]. Because of all of the creative twists and swirling structures, the locals have nicknamed this neighborhood the “Block of Discord.”

Perhaps the most famous Modernisme architect of that time was Antoni Gaudí. Our word “gaudy” (which means overly extravagant and showy) derives from Gaudí and his exaggerated, whimsical designs. And yet, if you look closely at his work, you will begin to appreciate his style and ability to design buildings that do not look like they should be structurally sound, and yet are.



Sagrada Família, photo by Wjh31, CC BY-SA 3.0.

A Child's Geography

Gaudí's most famous work is the unfinished Church of the Holy Family, or La Sagrada Familia. He worked on it for over 40 years until his death in 1926. The work continues on the church. Its projected date of completion is the year 2026, the 100th anniversary of Antoni Gaudí's death. Like the construction of many grand cathedrals throughout the ages, this project will take many lifetimes to complete.

There is another Gaudí masterpiece that I would like for you to see, the colorful and whimsical Park Güell [gu-éya] (image on page 18). Park Güell began as a housing project, intending to provide homes for sixty families, but the high-end housing development flopped. However, a century later, it is a great success as a city park. Today, families flock to the park to enjoy the fanciful decor and the playful shapes of this unusual playground overlooking the grand city of Barcelona and the sparkling Mediterranean Sea beyond.

Before we call it a day, we need to take a side trip out of town to the Montserrat Monastery. A visit to the northwest corner of Spain would not be complete without seeing the monastery.

Montserrat means “serrated mountain” and you can understand how the monastery got its name as we wind our way into the mountains northwest of Barcelona. They look like the jagged edge of a serrated knife. You might want to keep your eyes on the road, as it is easy to get carsick on twisty mountain highways such as this one.

Now for the best part... we get to ride a **téléphérique** (which in English we would call a **gondola**, lift, or cable car) further up into the jagged mountains and be delivered right to the doorstep of the Benedictine abbey. Although once destroyed by Napoleon, the Montserrat Monastery was beautifully restored in the 19th century and has become the heart and soul of the Catalan people.



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A handful of Benedictine monks carry on the monastery's spiritual tradition. The Catalan people have a slogan “ora et labora” which means “pray and work” and these words sum up the life of a monk living in Montserrat.

Montserrat Monastery taken by Rodrigo Paredes, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Pilgrims of the Catholic faith journey here to see the La Moreneta, a small wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, which was discovered here in the 12th century. The legend surrounding the statue is that St. Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, physician, and evangelist of Jesus Christ, carved the masterpiece, but **carbon dating** indicates that she is only 800 years old. Still, pilgrims reach out and touch the orb in Mary's hand to seek and receive her blessing.

It's time to drive back down the mountain and get some rest before we continue our tour of Spain. We have been blessed to wander through Moorish citadels, see an old bullfighting arena, watch flamenco dancers, tour the Eixample district of Barcelona, gaze upon the early work of Picasso, and ride a gondola car to a monastery hidden between serrated mountain peaks.

What will tomorrow's adventures bring? Only tomorrow will tell. Get some rest; there is still so much more of Spain to discover!



But first, tell me what you remember about...

Geography of Spain:

What chain of mountains forms Spain's northern border with France? Do you remember what the highest mountain is in Spain? It's located on the island of Tenerife. There's also something special about this mountain – can you tell me what it is?

Do you remember why Spanish farmers are able to grow such bountiful crops? Tell me! Of the crops that were mentioned, which are your favorites?

Can you name some of the animals you might find in Spain?

Barcelona:

What can you tell me about Barcelona, the diverse capital city of Catalonia? Do you remember which culture founded it almost 2000 years ago?

Which famous artist was from Barcelona? Have you ever seen any of his paintings? If so, what do you think of them?

Wow, the Eixample district is amazing...what are your thoughts about the architecture? Would you like to visit the Park Güell or the Sagrada Familia?

What does “ora et labora” mean?

Timeline of Spain

500 BC	↑	Toledo becomes important steel-working center
AD 632		Mohammed dies
AD 732		Battle of Tours (Poitiers)
AD 1492		Moors driven out of Spain / Columbus sails for the New World
AD 1500		King Phillip the 3rd constructs the Plaza Mayor in Madrid
AD 1519		Ferdinand Magellan sails from Seville to circumnavigate the globe
AD 1588		The Spanish Armada defeated by the British Navy
AD 1850		Planning begins for the expansion of Barcelona
AD 1900		The Spanish Civil War
AD 1926		Antoni Gaudi dies during the building of the Sagrada Familia
AD 1992	↓	Summer Olympics held in Barcelona





Spain, Pt II

Further Up and Farther In

I am excited for what today will bring. We are traveling up to the Basque Country. The land of the Basques is one of Europe's nations without a country. Its territory comprises parts of northern Spain and southern France in the Pyrenees Mountains. The Basque people have a strong and vibrant heritage. They do not consider themselves Spanish or French; they are Basque. They even speak their own language.

When they drew the political borders of Europe, the Basque Country was left out. You won't find this country on any standard European map, but the Basque people define their country like this:



Map of Basque Country, by Gabriela Trisca, public domain, license CC BY-SA 3.0.

We are meeting up with two friends, Antton and Amaia. Amaia studied the English language abroad in the United States for a summer and lived with friends of our family. It was great to spend time with her and learn about her unique culture. Later, her brother Antton came out for a visit, and we enjoyed getting to know him as well. Now, they are happy to share their country, their heritage, and their people with us. We will learn a great deal about the Basque today! Let's go!

Our friends will meet us in Pamplona, the capital of the Kingdom of Navarre in Spain. This city is best known for the Running of the Bulls during the St. Fermin [fair-meen] Festival. We will be there just in time to watch.

“Kaixo,” Antton shouts from across the square.

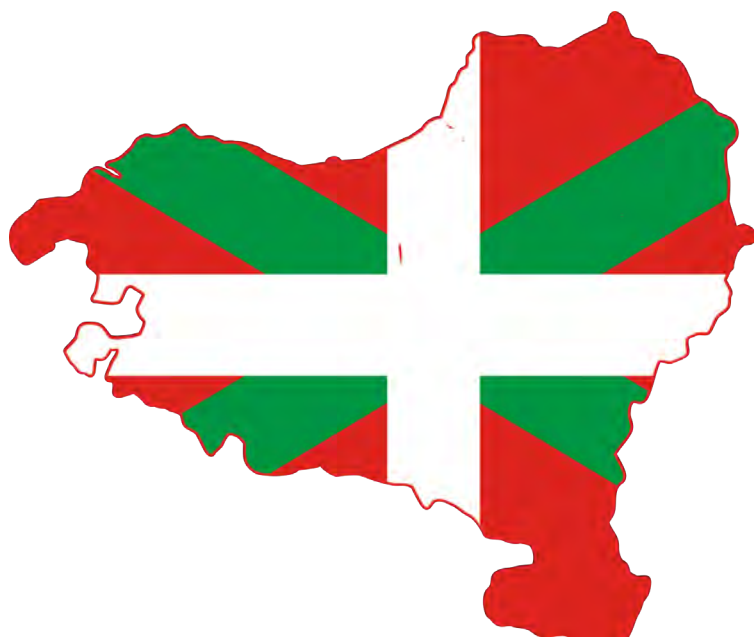
“Epa!” says Amaia, who hurries a bit faster than her brother to reach us.

These are the words spoken in Basque that mean “hello.” *Kaixo* [kay-sho] is the more formal greeting, but *epa* is the word used to greet friends.

The Basque language is like no other language in the world. You might think that it would be similar to Spanish or French, but actually it is not. In fact, it has no similarities to any European language or any language family whatsoever. Basque [Euskara in Basque] is believed to be an ancient language, pre-dating the arrival of Latin speakers from the age of the Roman Empire. It is considered a linguistic curiosity, since it has no living relatives.

The Basque language has been discouraged, even suppressed, from use by both the Spanish and French governments throughout the centuries, who believed that it would lead to **insurrection** and **revolution**. However, it re-emerged in the 1900’s and has contributed greatly to the identity and independence of the Basque people.

“Epa,” we say in return. Our attempt to greet our new friends in their language is met with warm smiles and nods of appreciation.



“You are going to love Pamplona and the Running of the Bulls,” declares Amaia, switching to English. Her English is perfect and so is her Spanish. Most Basque people speak at least three languages fluently. “Hurry, let’s find a suitable place to watch the run before it starts. Stay close. The crowds get very animated during the festival.”

While we wait, Antton prepares us for what we are about to see. He has to shout a little for us to hear him over the din of the crowd. “The Running of the Bulls has



The Running of the Bulls, Pamplona, Spain, public domain image.

a long history. It began with cattle drivers who needed to move their herds quickly from pasture to market. Later, the tradition continued as bullfighting became more popular and herders ran their bulls through the streets of town to the corrals of the bullring. But it wasn't until Ernest Hemingway wrote about it in *The Sun Also Rises* that Pamplona's Running of the Bulls became world famous.

"After a preliminary benediction and prayer, a rocket will be fired that signals that the running has begun. The bulls are let loose on this cordoned-off street. The crowds go wild! But here's the crazy part that makes this event so exciting and so dangerous. Young men, who have been pre-approved and considered fit for the event, run in front of the charging bulls to incite them and hurry them through the streets to their destination, the bullring.

"While this is certainly a dangerous race, as these men run the risk of being gored by bull horns or trampled under bull hooves, there are exits all along the street that are wide enough for a person but not for a bull. Thank goodness for that!

"The run will last only about four minutes as the men and bulls run through four streets of the town. It goes by quickly, so let's watch it together now."

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-spain-ch1-2/>

Wow, isn't that something? I have never witnessed anything like that in my life! While no one was seriously injured during today's run, that is not always the case as bulls are very dangerous animals. Let's wait for the crowd to subside before getting out of here. Most of the injuries that happen during the Running of the Bulls are from the crowds pushing each other to see the event and then pushing each other to leave when it's over.

The bulls run once a day for seven days during the Festival of St. Fermin, which takes place during the month of July. A legend is told that St. Fermin was the first bishop of Pamplona, and that he converted 40,000 followers to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amaia declares, "Let's take the next train to San Sebastian, our home town, so we can show you around there. It is beautiful this time of year and the coastline is breathtaking. Shall we go?"

Our train takes us due north through the mountains to the city of San Sebastian, sitting like a jewel on the Bay of Biscay. San Sebastian is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Spain. You can see why. The sandy beach looks silky and the waves beckon us to play, just as they did to royalty of old. Doesn't that island in the middle of the bay look like a turtle?

San Sebastian is a center of Basque culture and Basque food. Before a refreshing swim in the sea, we should visit a few tapas bars and sample some of the local cuisine. **Tapas** are like little appetizers stabbed with a toothpick. It's best not to fill up too much in any one place because there are so many tapas bars to visit. Hopping from tapas bar to tapas bar is the way the locals eat lunch.

Let's step in here and see what is on the menu.

menu

BERENJENAS FRITAS

fried eggplant slices, cabrales dip | 7

PLÁTANOS DE CANARIAS FRITOS

fried plantains, spicy mojo picón dip | 6.5

CROQUETAS DE POLLO Y JAMÓN

chicken, serrano ham béchamel croquettes | 7

MANCHEGO FRITO

fried cheese, herbs, orange marmalade | 7.5

BROCHETA DE CHORIZO

grilled spanish chorizo skewer, peppers, onions | 7.5

HUEVOS ESTRELLADOS

slightly spicy sweet potato fries, egg, diced bacon | 8

BUEY A LA PLANCHA

grilled angus sirloin steak, potato and mushroom purée | 10

PANCETA ASADA

slow-roasted pork belly, shallots, golden apple | 9

TORTILLA DE PATATAS

moist, potato and onion omelet | 7

COLES DE BRUSELAS

sauteed brussel sprouts, dates, almonds, sea salt | 7

PATATAS BRAVAS

fried potatoes, spicy tomato sauce, aioli | 6.5

ATÚN A LA PLANCHA

grilled ahi tuna, mango relish | 9

MEJILLONES CON CHORIZO

fresh sautéed mussels, chorizo, ginger broth | 8

PULPO A LA GALLEGA

steamed octopus, paprika, potato | 9

CALAMARES A LA ANDALUZA

fried squid, lemon aioli | 8

GAMBAS AL AJILLO

sauteed shrimp, extra virgin olive oil, garlic, hot peppers | 9

PASTELITOS DE CANGREJO

tasca-style crab cakes, frisée salad, aioli | 9

CHOCOLATE A LA TAZA (thick hot chocolate)

CHURROS (fried batter sprinkled with sugar)



San Sebastian taken by Juanedc, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

A Basque specialty you are sure to love is cheese made from sheep's milk topped with walnuts and apple jam. Sounds delicious to me! What do you think? Will you give it a try? What else will you try?

When we are finished, we just count up the toothpicks on our plate and pay for what we have eaten. "Now," Amaia tells us, "Let's go to the beach and play in the waves."

She tells us that in the 1840s, Queen Isabel II of Spain was a regular visitor to this very beach. Her doctors recommended that she treat her skin problems by sunbathing here by the warm sea. The royalty of Spain and France took notice of this, and soon San Sebastian was on the map as the seaside destination for the rich and famous.

"After a swim in the sea, you must come to our home for dinner and to spend the night with our family."

We tell Antton and Amaia that we would like that very much.

Over dinner with their mother and father, we discuss plans for tomorrow's excursion. We will be on our own again, but they provide us with good ideas on what to do next and how to get there. We decide that we will visit the city of Bilbao, also in the Basque Country, home of the famous Guggenheim Museum. There we will find a breathtaking modern structure that houses some of the most enjoyable artwork in Europe. The hands-on exhibits in the Guggenheim Museum beckon visitors to wander, interact, and play; guests young and old fall in love with the abstract art creations. We are sure to love it, they tell us.

After we have spent some time in Bilbao, we will leave the Basque Country and head for Madrid, the capital of Spain. But before we get there, we will make a quick stop in Segovia. There is a castle that we simply must see. Walt Disney was so taken with this charming hilltop palace that he modeled Cinderella's castle after it. What do you say? Does this sound like a fun day to you?

Here are some links where you can take a virtual tour of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum and the Segovia Castle. Then after that... I'll see you in Madrid!



Alcázar de Segovia, by Rafael Verdejo, public domain image, license CC BY 2.0.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-spain-ch1-2/>

“Adio!” We say goodbye in the Basque language to our lovely friends. “Aio” they say in reply, as this word means goodbye to friends. “Aio. Erskirrik asko.” Thank you!

Tell me what you remember about...

Basque Country:

Where is the land of Basque located? What language do they speak? Is this language recognized by Spain and France?

Do you remember what happens in Pamplona each July? During what festival does it take place?

Can you describe the Running of the Bulls to me? Who participates? Why are so many people injured during the Running of the Bulls each year?

What did you think about the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao? Google search to learn about the colossal piece of modern-art that has taken up permanent residence in front of the Guggenheim? What's its name?



Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, public domain image by MykReeve, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Of Castles and Giants

Wasn't the castle of Segovia almost magical? That is how Walt Disney felt when he saw it. That is why his version of it as Cinderella's castle has become the iconic image for The Walt Disney Company's theme parks and feature films. Pretty spectacular!

When we reach Germany, in a later chapter, we'll visit another magnificent castle with pointed turrets and fairytale towers, the inspiration for a different Disney castle. Did you know there were two?

It is a short train ride to reach the capital city of Spain... Madrid. With over 4 million people, Madrid is the 3rd largest metropolis in Europe, after London and Berlin. Thankfully, it has a well-organized city layout and superior public transportation system so we shouldn't get lost.

Madrid is located on the Manzanares River in the very center of the country. In the country of Spain, all roads lead to Madrid. The sprawling metropolis is bordered on the north by the region of Castile-León and on the south by the region of Castile-La Mancha.

After we drop off our bags at our hotel, we can start our walking tour of one of the most artistic and cultural cities in the world. Within the urban area, we will find artifacts from old Roman **villas**, a Visigoth **basilica** near the church of Santa Maria, and medieval fortresses from the glory years of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, who commissioned Christopher Columbus to explore what lay beyond the Atlantic Ocean.



The Plaza Mayor in Madrid, Spain, public domain image by Sebastian Dubiel, CC BY-SA 3.0.

We'll start at the Plaza Mayor. The Spanish word "mayor" means "major." So this is the major, or main, square in Madrid. King Philip III built this square during the 16th century. A statue of him stands in the center. The buildings surrounding this large area are residences with balconies overlooking the square. Can you guess how many balconies there are? I'll save you some time counting: 237 balconies overlook Plaza Mayor. How would you like to live in a home that overlooks such a large public square?

The plaza has hosted many events, including soccer games, farmer's markets, and bullfights over the centuries. During the **Spanish Inquisition**, suspected **heretics** were put on trial and punished here in this main square of town. Since today is not a market day, there are no street vendors selling tortillas or empanadas. But we can walk down a side street to find some lunch.

Food in Madrid is a mixture of the cuisine found in other parts of Spain because when people moved from the outlying towns, villages, and regions of Spain into the big city, they brought their own cultures and food preferences with them.

Let's duck into this restaurant and see what is on the menu. Oh my! I'll bet you didn't expect this! Dried and cured ham legs dangle all along the walls of the cafe, displayed as though they were fine wines. The Spanish have a bit of an obsession with ham. In fact, you can see here that they serve sev-

eral varieties at different prices. The longer the pork has cured or the better the conditions in which the pig was raised (such as acorn fed and free range), the more expensive the ham.

Let's watch the man behind the counter, who is slicing a ham, to learn a little more about this Spanish delicacy. In this video, he even allows Phil, the host of *I'll Have What Phil's Having*, to try his hand at slicing the "jamón."

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-spain-ch1-2/>

Tortillas are on the menu too. Only these tortillas may not be the kind you are used to eating. Unlike flat bread, the Spanish Tortilla is more similar to an omelet filled with potatoes. It looks delicious. Shall we order ham and tortillas for lunch? We'll wash it down with Leche Merengada, a sweetened milk drink sprinkled with cinnamon. It's partially frozen, so it's like eating sweet, milky snow. Yum!

I don't know about you, but I am stuffed. I could use some exercise! Let's walk to our next destination, the Puerta del Sol. If the Plaza Mayor acts as the front parlor of Madrid, the Puerta del Sol would be the family room. Its name means the "Gate of the Sun." Puerta del Sol is a crowded space because it is where people meet with one another and where city celebrations take place. There are people eating lunch outside on the benches and street performers entertaining the crowds. Puerta del Sol is also the public transportation hub of Madrid. We can get on a metro train or a bus here that will take us anywhere we want to go in the city.



San Sebastian taken by Sergio Russo, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

However, the next place to visit is the Royal Palace and it's not far away, so we'll continue on foot to work off some of our big lunch.

The name of the palace in Spanish is the *Palácio Real de Madrid*, which means "Royal Palace of Madrid." Its enormous size is awe-inspiring. There are over 2,000 rooms in this palace. King Philip V, who was born in Versailles, France, commissioned the building project. Although he ruled Spain for 40 years, he was always a Frenchman at heart. The *Palácio* was meant to be the "Versailles" of Spain.

Although this is the official residence of the King of Spain, he and his family do not live here. However, he does use it to host special dinner parties and hold formal ceremonies. He can seat up to 150 guests around his incredibly long dining room table.

Let's go inside and look around. It's Wednesday so admission is free! Inside we are greeted by an enormous staircase, acres of paintings and tapestries, glittering chandeliers, and a lavish throne room. There are many striking displays of armor and porcelain, and lovely painted **frescoes** adorn the walls and ceilings. This grand palace was built to showcase the wealth of the Spanish Empire that once spread through many continents and across the vast ocean, spanning both **hemispheres**. "The empire on which the sun never sets" was the motto for the extensive Spanish Empire.

How did this empire become so large and wealthy? Explorers like Christopher Columbus and other European seafarers discovered new lands across the Atlantic Ocean and brought treasures found abroad back to their homeland. The discovery of the New World also opened up trade and strengthened commerce, bringing with it boatloads of riches from around the world.



Palácio Real de Madrid taken by Luis Garcia, public domain, CC BY-SA 3.0.

But new land brought new trouble. Most wars are fought over land, between those who own it, and those who want to own it. As the Spanish Empire grew, so did its opportunities to fight with its neighbors, especially England and France. In 1588, the Spanish Armada, a fleet of 130 ships, set sail from Spain in an attempt to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I of England. But it was an expensive disaster for Spain, who was soundly defeated by the British Navy.

Over the course of many years and many wars, the Spanish Empire weakened. Eventually, Spain became part of Napoleon's France. Later, Spain rebelled and King Ferdinand VII reclaimed the throne of Spain.

During the 20th century, Spain entered into a long and arduous war, the Spanish Civil War, when the Spanish people fought each other. By the end of this war, Spain was so weakened as a nation that a dictator named General Francisco Franco was able to gain control of Spain. He ruled it with an iron fist for the next 40 years. Upon his death, Juan Carlos became king, but he adopted a new constitution that made Spain a democracy.

That is Spain's long history in a nutshell. It is important to learn about the past of all people groups and the countries in which they live. Speaking of history, tomorrow we will visit the Alcázar castle. It was originally a Roman fort and then became an Arab fortress. Later, when the Christians pushed the Moors out of Spain, it became a Christian castle.



Young Isabella of Spain, painting by Gerard David, 1520.

The Alcázar castle was a favorite residence of the kings and queens of the Kingdom of Castile. It was there that Queen Isabella was crowned Queen of Castile and León before her marriage to King Ferdinand of Aragón in 1469, which joined their two great kingdoms making Spain a dominant force during its glory years.

And after that, we'll visit Toledo in the territory of La Mancha. Have you heard of it? Toledo has been an important city throughout the years as a steel-working and sword-making center since about 500 BC. Toledo came to the attention of Rome when Hannibal passed through it during the Punic Wars and it soon became a major supplier of weaponry for the Roman Legions.

Would you like to step into a modern sword-making forge? The Men at Arms: Reforged team recreates Aragorn's sword from *The Lord of the Rings* movie. **Note to parents:** The introduction includes some brief battle scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* and the conclusion contains unrealistic gore. My personal recommendation is to skip the conclusion.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-spain-ch1-2/>



The Windmills of La Mancha, public domain image by Hugo Díaz-Regañón, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Later, Toledo hosted the historic Visigoth Councils of Toledo and then became the first major city to instigate the Christian Reconquista against the Arab Moors. The famous El Greco Museum is located there. But these are not the only reasons that you may have heard of Toledo of La Mancha.

Toledo and La Mancha are the setting for the best-selling fiction book of all time, *Don Quixote* [key-ho-tay], written by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. The story follows the adventures of Don Quixote, a man who reads so many chivalric novels that he loses his mind and decides to set out to revive **chivalry**, undo past wrongs, and bring justice back to the world. He recruits a farmer as his squire and together they set out on their imaginative knightly adventure. Considered the most influential work of literature from the Spanish Golden Age, *Don Quixote* has had a significant influence on other authors and their books, namely Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

Perhaps you will be inspired to read it when we pass by the graceful windmills of La Mancha, the windmills that Don Quixote believed were giants that he had to fight and slay to save the world from evil. I did mention that he was delusional, right? Here is an excerpt from the book:

Just then they came in sight of thirty or forty windmills that rise from that plain. And no sooner did Don Quixote see them that he said to his squire, "Fortune is guiding our affairs

better than we ourselves could have wished. Do you see over yonder, friend Sancho, thirty or forty hulking giants? I intend to do battle with them and slay them. With their spoils we shall begin to be rich for this is a righteous war and the removal of so foul a brood from off the face of the earth is a service God will bless.”

“What giants?” asked Sancho Panza.

“Those you see over there,” replied his master, “with their long arms. Some of them have arms well nigh two leagues in length.”

“Take care, sir,” cried Sancho. “Those over there are not giants but windmills. Those things that seem to be their arms are sails which, when they are whirled around by the wind, turn the millstone.”

After we get a chance to “tilt at windmills”* like Don Quixote, we’ll be leaving the ancient and beautiful land of Spain. We have learned so much here and have a new appreciation for this country that dominates the Iberian Peninsula. I can’t wait to hear what you liked best about it.



Tell me what you remember about...

Madrid:

Have you enjoyed our trip through Spain so far? What is the capital city of Spain? Can you tell me some things that you might find hanging in cafés or markets in Spain?

What can you tell me about Plaza Mayor? Do you remember where it is located? Describe it for me. What types of events take place in Plaza Mayor?

Spain entered into a long and arduous war called the Spanish Civil War. What is a civil war?

Toledo and La Mancha:

Have you ever read Don Quixote? Maybe you want to now! Don Quixote inspired many other authors; can you name two? Don Quixote jousts windmills because he thought they were monsters. Can you think of any other things that are man-made that might look like monsters if you didn’t know what they really were?

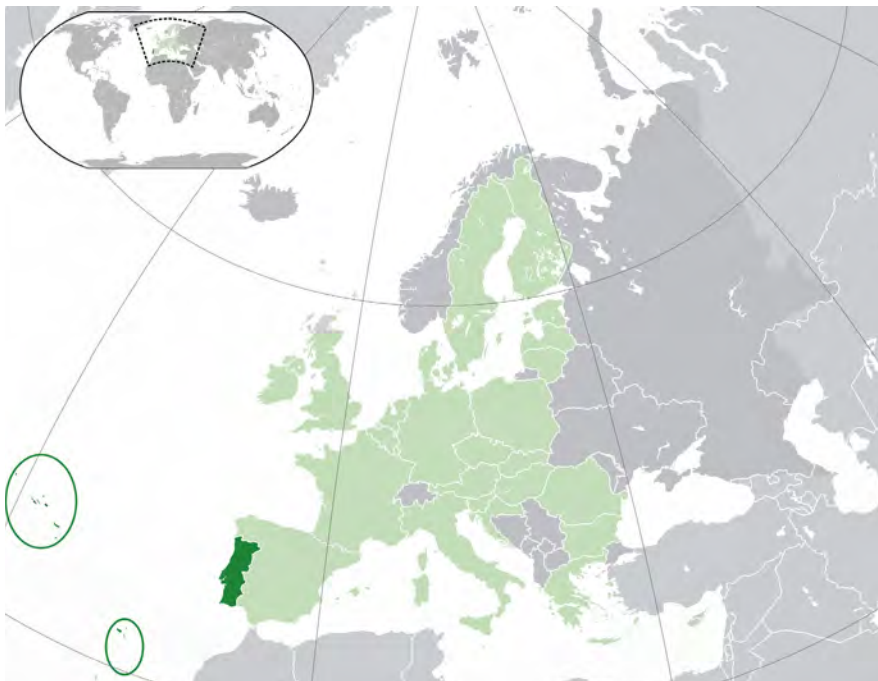
* **Tilting at windmills** is an English idiom, which means attacking imaginary enemies. The word “tilt,” in this context, comes from jousting.



Lisbon – The City of Crows

Speeding across the hot dry plateau of central Spain on a bullet train, we're on our way to the ancient seafaring town of Lisbon on the coast of Portugal. Lisbon seems like a great place to start our adventures through Portugal, which is one of the oldest countries in Europe. This small nation, which shares the Iberian Peninsula with Spain and Andorra, is over 900 years old. It was the first European country to send explorers across the Atlantic Ocean over 600 years ago and to become a global superpower with a vast empire stretching westward from Africa to Brazil, and eastward to India and China.

Portugal, located on the extreme edge of the Iberian Peninsula, has a long stretch of coastline along the gray and menacing Atlantic Ocean. Although most of Portugal is located on the mainland, two **archipelagos**, or island chains, beyond the vast watery horizon also belong to Portugal. These islands are called Madeira and the Azores. You can see them on your map.



Straight through the middle of the country runs a large river called the Tagus River. It flows down from the high plateau of Spain and eventually empties into the Atlantic at the city of Lisbon. The Tagus River divides Portugal in half. The northern half is somewhat mountainous, especially on its eastern border with Spain. The southern half of Portugal, south of Lisbon, is less hilly and has wide-open plains.



The Azores and Mount Pico, public domain image by Björn Ehrlich, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The highest mountain in Portugal is not located in the north, or even on the mainland. Mount Pico is on the island of Pico in the Azores. More than just a volcano to the islanders, Mount Pico is a symbol of strength for all the people of Portugal.

We're starting our Portugal adventure in Lisbon, a medium-sized city at the mouth of the Tejo River. Lisbon was once considered the edge of the world, as you cannot go any further west in Europe than Lisbon. Today, its huge port welcomes ships from all around the globe, just as it did hundreds of years ago. Lisbon, the city that was once home to Ferdinand Magellan and Vasco da Gama, still feels like the gateway to the world.

Spanning the wide Tejo waters is Lisbon's mile-and-a-half long **suspension bridge**. It is one of the longest bridges in the world and looks strikingly similar to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. In fact, they are cousins. In 1966, the same company that designed and built the Golden Gate also built this bridge. No wonder!

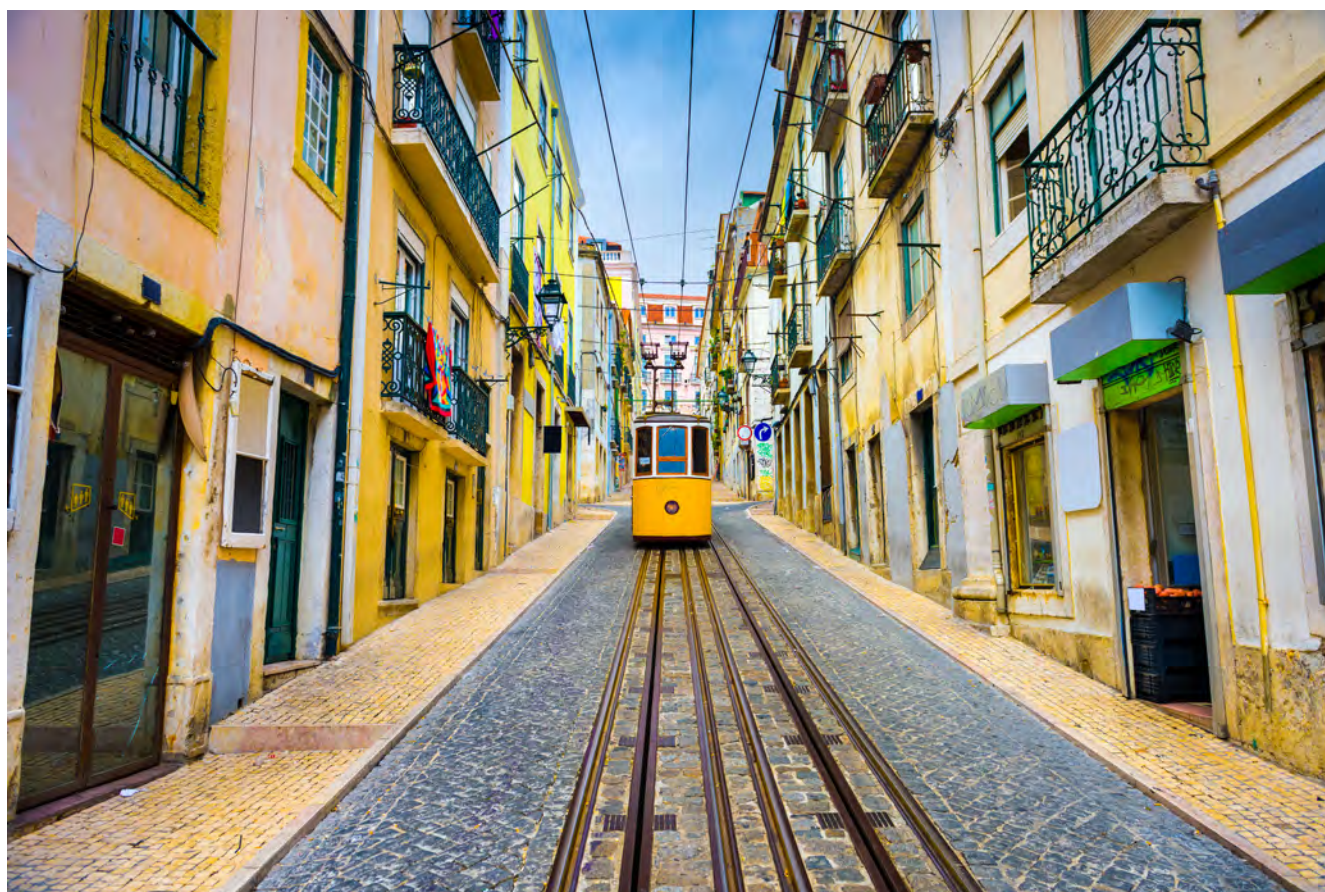
In many ways, this European city is reminiscent of San Francisco in California. But Lisbon is much, much older! It is as old as Rome and like Rome, was built on seven hills. Old **trolleys** clatter up and down the hills of Lisbon, through wide squares and around narrow cobbled corners.

While Lisbon's history goes back to Roman times, its golden age was during the 15th and 16th centuries when explorers like Vasco da Gama and others set out from Lisbon to sail around Africa, opening new trade routes to India and China. These new trade routes played a vital role in making Lisbon one of Europe's wealthiest cities.

A short time later, Portuguese explorers discovered places like Brazil in South America and brought home gold and diamonds, adding to Lisbon's wealth. That's why the people of Brazil speak Portuguese, the language of Portugal.

But not all of Portugal's history was sunshine and roses. Ruins around this city, such as the scarred pillars of the rebuilt church of São Domingos, memorialize Portugal's worst disaster. In 1755, a terrible earthquake struck the city on All Saint's Day, when most of the people of Lisbon were worshipping in churches.

It was said that people as far away as Ireland felt the tremors of the quake. Over 30,000 people died that day and most of the city of Lisbon was **razed** to the ground by one of three disasters that happened within a few horrible minutes. The earthquake (#1) caused many fires (#2) to blaze throughout the city and triggered a massive tsunami (#3) that slammed into the harbor a few minutes later.



Trolley Car in Lisbon by @SeanPavonePhoto, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.



The Castelo de São Jorge in Lisbon, public domain image by Massimo Catarinella, CC BY-SA 3.0.

That is why this city is a mixture of old and new. For a European city, most of the buildings are considered “new” construction, having been built within the last 250 years. Many of its streets are broad to facilitate smooth traffic flow and the city’s well-designed grid layout is easy to navigate.

There is a castle in Lisbon called the Castelo de São Jorge, which translates to the “Castle of St. George,” named for St. George and the Dragon. Built by the Moors who swept in from North Africa during the 8th century, and conquered this region along with Spain, the castelo sits proudly on a high hill overlooking Lisbon. King Alfonso Henriques of Portugal drove out the Moors during the 12th century and claimed this palace for himself. Later, the royalty of Portugal took up residence elsewhere and the castle fell into ruins. Now, it is only an empty shell, but the surrounding park is lovely and has the best viewpoint of the city.

Shall we go see it?

Instead of hiking up the towering hill, we’ll ride the **funicular** to the top. Because Lisbon is such a hilly town, many trams and funiculars run throughout the city to help pedestrians get up and down the steep slopes. If you crossed a tram with an elevator, you would get a funicular. Let’s watch one now:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-portugal-ch3/>

The funicular that runs up to the Castelo de São Jorge packs tourists in like sardines on weekends, but not today. The castle at the top is large and imposing. Through the wide gate and across the nar-

row bridge, we duck through the archway of the crumbling outer walls and into the castle courtyard overgrown with large shade trees. Do you see the old cannons along the perimeter that once protected the **citadel**?

There are binoculars mounted on the wall too, so that we can look out across the city and far out to sea. Except for the sounds of birds chirping and chipmunks chattering, it is peaceful and quiet up here. Until, that is, the crows begin to caw.

Lisbon is infamous for being the city of crows. They are everywhere: up in the castle and down by the sea. The crow has been displayed as an official symbol of Lisbon since 1173, the year of Saint Vincent's death. During the Middle Ages, it was customary for every merchant in the city to keep a crow. And all of these pet crows were given the same name, Vicente, for their beloved saint.



The Alfama District in Lisbon, public domain image by di me amate il riflesso, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Let's descend into that maze of alleyways that tumbles down the hillside from the castle to the Tejo River. We'll walk since it's all downhill from here. This part of the city is called the Alfama. This salty fisherman's quarter survived the 1755 quake, so it has plenty of old-world charm along its narrow, cobbled streets.

The scent of clean laundry hanging out to dry mingles with the fishy smell of clams and seafood in this shabby, but quaint corner of Lisbon.

Listen. Do you hear that music? Perhaps we can find out where it is coming from. Around the narrow

street corner, we find a small square that beckons passersby to linger and listen awhile. A woman is singing a style of music called “fado.” **Fado** is a sorrowful Portuguese style of music that tells stories about hardship and fishing and life out at sea. Accompanying her is a man playing a Portuguese guitar, which is a 12-stringed instrument, a little fatter and rounder than a classical guitar.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-portugal-ch3/>

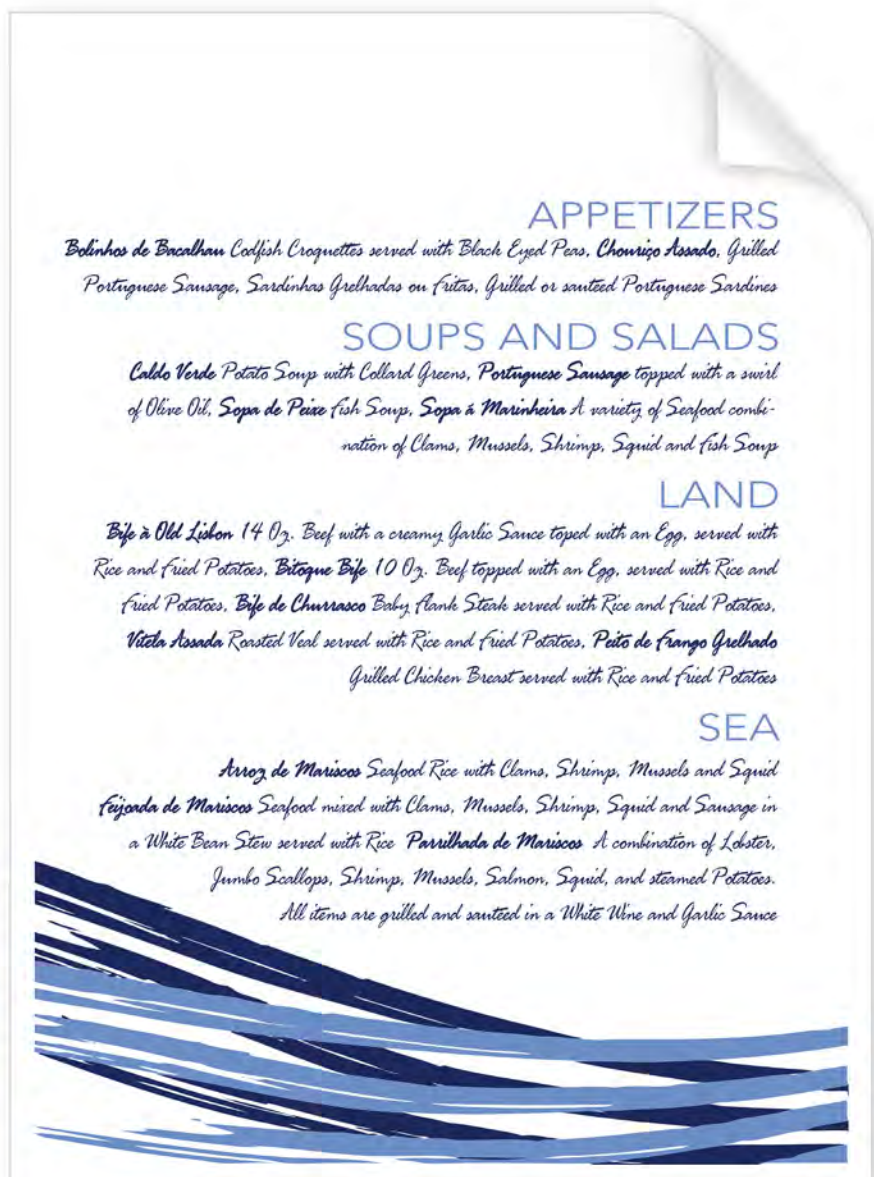
The sad music ends and everyone claps for the talented performers. Fado is such a unique style of music that is has been assigned world heritage status by **UNESCO**.

A couple blocks further down the hill, we’ll hop on the trolley that runs along the bottom of the Alfama district and make our way to Rossio Square, the most popular meeting place in this city. There, we can grab a bite to eat.

Lisbon is the capital of the Portuguese-speaking world and a melting pot of its once vast empire. Immigrants from former colonies such as Mozambique and Angola in Africa have added diversity and flavor to this unique city, making it just as likely that we will hear African music these days as Portuguese Fado. And we will likely find as much Brazilian or Indian food as Portuguese.

With a line extending outside the doors, this café looks like a local favorite. Here’s what’s on the menu:

Portugal is famous for its coffee-houses and pastries. For a thousand years, monks in monasteries have been creating pastries out of simple ingredients such as flour, eggs and almonds. For dessert, here are some choices:



Pastel de Nata – world-famous egg custard tart in filo dough, served warm, fresh out of the oven and sprinkled with cinnamon and powdered sugar.

Toucinho do Céu – classic Portuguese cake made with almonds.

Bola de Berlim – doughnut-like dessert made from sweet yeast dough, fried in oil, and filled with marmalade or jam. Dusted with powdered sugar.

What will you try?

That was delicious and filling. But we have more to see in Lisbon! We could ride the Elevador de Gloria, or Gloria Funicular, up that hill to the garden at the top. The funicular, built in 1885, was originally powered by water, then later by steam. Today, it runs on electricity. Or we can ride the Santa Justa Elevator that connects the lower town with the upper town. This elevator was constructed in 1902,

just a few years after its inspiration... the Eiffel Tower. Either way, let's head to the top of the hill for one more thing you need to see before we leave Lisbon.



It is the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, one of the most expensive chapels per square inch ever built. If you think that it looks like it came right out of the Vatican, then you would be right. Because it did. The chapel was constructed in Rome out of the most precious materials available and then it was used for one **papal** mass. After the mass was over, the chapel was disassembled and shipped here to Lisbon as a gift to the city.

The massive paintings on the walls are not paintings at all; they are called **mosaics** (a mosaic is created by assembling small bits of colored glass, stone, or other available materials to form an image). The Italians loved to include mosaics in their churches and cathedrals because candle smoke, which can dreadfully darken an oil painting, does not damage mosaics.

The Chapel of St. John, photo by Daniel Villafruela, CC BY-SA 3.0.

How did you like Lisbon? Are you ready to see the rest of Portugal, the countryside and the seaside towns? Let's remember what we have seen so far. Lisbon is a bustling port city located as far west as you can travel on the continent of Europe. Dating as far back as Rome, and also built on seven hills, Lisbon is proudly leading one of the oldest European nations. Quirky hillside transportation, ancient citadels, and delicious food mingle together to create a city as retro and classic as they come.

We can rest a while on the train; then we'll explore more of Portugal.

Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

What can you tell me about Portugal's archipelagos? The highest mountain in Portugal is located on one of these islands. Why is it special to the people of Portugal?

Lisbon:

Why was Lisbon once considered the edge of the world? Why is this no longer true?

One of the longest bridges in the world is in Lisbon. What river does the bridge span? Can you tell me a fun fact that you learned about the bridge?

Tell me about Portugal's greatest disaster. When did it happen? Who did it impact?

Riding a funicular seems like a great way to see Lisbon. Describe the things you think you would see.



Cape Sagres in Portugal taken by Paulo Miranda, public domain image, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Edge of the World

We're on our way to the rugged southwestern tip of Portugal. It is called Cape Sagres. In the days before Columbus, this was as close as you could get to the edge of our supposedly "flat" earth. A lighthouse marks the place that people in ancient times referred to as "the end of the world." Today, you will find fishermen casting their lines off the dizzyingly high cliffs and travelers taking "edge of Europe" photos with the vast Atlantic Ocean as their backdrop.

Cape Sagres is where Prince Henry the Navigator established his school of navigation. Henry was the son of King John I, who was the first Portuguese king of the House of Azov. John I established his kingdom and throne from the old castle we explored earlier while in Lisbon, the Castelo de São Jorge. In fact, he named it after Saint George, the warrior-saint who is usually depicted slaying a dragon, when he married the English Princess, Philippa of Lancaster in 1387.

Prince Henry encouraged his father to conquer Ceuta, a great port city on the northern coast of Africa. Henry's fascination with Africa began when he learned about the trade routes that ended in Ceuta. He was intrigued with the idea of expanding trade for Portugal by exploring new trade routes, particularly by sea.

This fascination led him to found the School of Navigation on Cape Sagres. It was from here that Prince Henry sent forth his sailors ever further into the unknown. And it was here that he debriefed with them, learning from his explorers as they washed back ashore, weathered and worn from their adventures. The School of Navigation was *the* place for sailors of the 15th century to come and learn about map-making, ship-building, navigation, trade, and foreign languages in hopes of becoming world-famous, sea-faring explorers to newly discovered lands.

Salema is a salty sea town that is not far from here. This simple fishing village is a curious place to explore. Not much has changed in Salema in the last several hundred years. You will still see weath-



Henry the Navigator by Nuno Gonçalves, public domain image.

er-worn fishermen going about their work of mending pots and cleaning their catch, mostly octopi, out in the cool of the morning; and women wearing head scarves and seven-layer petticoats, hanging out their laundry to dry in the fresh ocean breeze.

Today, we will go out to sea with Marcelo in his fishing boat to “check the pots.” Fishermen drop down clay pots along the seabed just off shore, a fishing technique they have been practicing since ancient times. We learn that the pottery jars are octopus traps. The octopus, thinking these pots would make a nice cozy place to relax, climbs in and gets comfortable. He sets himself about the task of ambushing prey for his next meal, not realizing that he has been ambushed himself.



Pots for catching octopi, coast of Portugal, public domain image by GanMed64, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Marcelo hoists the jars and checks to see if there is an octopus inside. The octopus hangs on for dear life, as his new home is dragged suddenly out of the water. Once inside the boat, he is shocked by a spray of mace and quickly evacuates his refuge. Later this morning, the octopus will be sold in the village fish market and cooked up for someone’s dinner. Would you like to try a little octopus before we leave Salema and travel north to explore the rest of Portugal?

It only takes a few hours to drive from the southern tip to the northern region of Portugal, but we'll want to make a few stops along the way. The first stop is a cork oak forest.



Cork oak taken by Martin Olssen, CC BY-SA 3.0

Perhaps you have seen cork on the tops of wine bottles or maybe used as a bulletin board in your home or school. Have you ever thought about where that cork comes from? It comes from the bark of cork oak trees! Over 50% of the world's cork is grown in the small country of Portugal.

Let's watch the workers harvest some cork. Cork is only collected once a year—in the summertime. Each individual tree can only be harvested once every nine years so that the tree has time to grow back its cork. Trees are not cut down or harmed during the harvest, which makes cork a **renewable resource**. (A renewable resource is a resource that replaces itself naturally and is used over again. Examples are: oxygen, fresh water, solar energy, and timber. Renewable resources may also include commodities such as wood, paper, and leather.)

Cork is always cut by hand, very carefully, so as not to damage the tree. It is against the law to cut down a cork tree in Portugal. For this

reason, the workers are trained carefully and are very skilled. This skill is often passed down through families, from fathers to their sons.

Let's watch these men as they harvest cork:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-portugal-ch3/>

The cork industry employs 60,000 people in Portugal and is a 2 billion dollar industry, supplying bottle corks, corkboards, and cork flooring all around the world.

On our way north, we'll pass through Lisbon again, a good excuse to stop at the Belem Tower at the mouth of the Tejo River. As we cross the bridge that spans the broad river, we can see this imposing



The Belem Tower in Lisbon, Portugal, public domain image by Daniel Feliciano, CC BY-SA 3.0.

medieval fortress ahead. About 500 years ago, King John II built the four-story tower to protect Lisbon from attacks by sea. It is a very stately and strong fortress constructed from local Portuguese limestone. Over the years, it has been used for defense, as barracks for soldiers, and as a prison.

Passing through the Belem district, we can see some other fascinating sights. After the earthquake of 1755, Portuguese royalty moved their residence here and built it out of wood rather than stone. Adjacent to the royal palace is the coach museum. In 1905, when the Queen of Portugal realized that cars would make horse-drawn carriages obsolete, she decided to preserve her collection of fine royal coaches. The coach museum displays seventy of her gilded coaches in her elegant old riding room. Some of these coaches are more than 400 years old!

Also, you can see the old monastery where sailors went to worship before sailing into the unknown. Famous explorers, such as Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan, spent full nights in prayer here, beseeching the Lord for good health and safe travels before setting forth on their daring adventures.

About 10 miles north of Lisbon is Mafra and the Mafra National Palace, one of the largest palaces in the world. Have you ever seen anything so massive in your life? At one time, 45,000 people were working on it to complete it. To fulfill a promise he made to his wife, King John V built this palace

about 300 years ago. He promised her that if she bore him a child, he would build a **convent**. The birth of his first child, Princess Barbara, led to the beginning of construction on this magnificent structure conveniently located near his favorite hunting grounds. The sumptuous **Baroque** complex became a natural second home for Portuguese royalty who enjoyed the quiet country lifestyle away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. Its intended use as a convent was forgotten.

We'll enter between the two main towers in the front of the palace. Bells ring joyously, welcoming visitors from near and far. First, we pass through the extravagant basilica, or church, then through the rooms of the royal residence. Soon, we'll come to the best part... the library! If you love books, then you will love this. The library is the highlight of the palace. Inside, the walls, which are two stories high, are lined with 40,000 rare and expensive books.

We'll end our grand tour of Portugal by visiting its birthplace... Guimarães. Many say that Guimarães is the most charming place in the country. This quaint, historic town sits high in the northern mountains of Portugal and she welcomes locals and visitors alike with her colorful buildings and well-manicured parks.

Guimarães is known as the “cradle city” of Portugal because Henry of Burgundy established it during the 10th century as the first seat of government for the Portuguese. It is also the birthplace of Alfonso I, the first king of Portugal. Additionally, the city played a significant role in the Battle of São Mamede in 1128, which led to the formation of Portugal as a nation, one of the oldest in Europe at 900 years old. For these reasons, three words are engraved in one of the old towers of the original city wall: “Aqui nasceu Portugal” (Portugal was born here).

Let's grab a chair and some coffee or hot chocolate in one of the cafés in the town's main square and enjoy some people watching. Today is the festival of the Popular Saints (Santos Populares), celebrating Saint Anthony, Saint John, and Saint Peter. Many people get married on this day, and there will be fireworks tonight! People are dancing in the streets and enjoying themselves today.



Oliveira Square in Guimarães, public domain image by Feliciano, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Beautiful, colorful Portugal “at the edge of the world,” Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

Our server, Alfonso, brings us some food that we didn’t order. It is bread and sardines. He explains that it is festival food and that it is on the house. Alfonso sees our quizzical looks and tells us, “We eat bread and fish to celebrate the saints and to remember Jesus’ miracle of the loaves and fishes.”

Oh, now we understand. We thank Alfonso and he bows slightly before heading back in to the kitchen.

We noticed another strange thing happening around us today. Many people are carrying around little plastic hammers in their hands or in their pockets. When they see a friend, or someone they know, each person takes a turn hitting their friends on the forehead with the little lightweight hammers. They believe it will bring them good luck. It looks odd, but everyone is laughing and enjoying themselves.

Our visit to Portugal has come to an end. The Portuguese people have deep roots, strong traditions, and kind hospitality. They have made us feel welcome and like we belong here. But we have more medieval kingdoms to explore! So, we nod our heads to these fine, adventurous people and their historic land as we set our eyes toward two tiny countries to the east—Andorra and Monaco. Our next adventure awaits...

Tell me what you remember about...

Cape Sagres:

Did you enjoy our trip to Cape Sagres? Tell me what makes this tip of Portugal so special. Would you have liked to attend Prince Henry the Navigator's School of Navigation? What skills would you have liked to learn at his school?

What do fishermen in Salema catch in clay pots? Describe the process of fishing with these pottery jars.

Northern Portugal:

Much of the world's cork is grown in Portugal. What did you learn about growing and harvesting cork? Why is it a renewable resource? Tell me about some other renewable resources.

Can you paint me a picture with words that describes the beautiful Mafra National Palace? I think my favorite room would be the library! Do you remember how many books are in it?

Timeline of Portugal

AD 700	↑	Moors conquer Portugal and build Castelo de Sao Jorge
AD 1100		King Alfonso Henriques drive the Moors out of Portugal
AD 1128		The Battle of Sao Mamede
AD 1755		Earthquake, fire, and tidal wave kills 30,000 people in Lisbon
AD 1885		Gloria Funicular built in Lisbon
AD 1905		The queen of Portugal puts her royal coaches on display
AD 1966	↓	Suspension bridge built in Lisbon

Timelines of Andorra and Monaco

AD 803	↑	Charlemagne rescues Andorra from the Moors
AD 988		Andorra becomes an independent state
AD 1962		Peter Seeger writes song about Andorra
AD 1215		Monaco founded as a colony of Genoa
AD 1297		Monaco captured by Francois Grimaldi
AD 1419		Monaco purchased from Spain by the Grimaldis
AD 1956	↓	Grace Kelly and the Prince of Monaco marry



Tiny Kingdoms, Part I

Andorra: The Land that I Adore

Europe was once a continent made up of hundreds of tiny kingdoms, **dukedom**s, and **fiefdom**s. These “countries” were only about as big as the distance that a cannonball could fire from the castle walls. Only a handful of these miniscule countries have survived. Over the centuries, most of those tiny kingdoms were merged with more powerful kings and rulers to form larger nations. The boundary lines of Europe have been drawn and redrawn so many times like an artist’s series of sketches that have been crumpled up and tossed into the trash can. However, some regions have hardly changed over thousands of years.

Today, we are strapping on our backpacks and lacing up our hiking boots as we head to the first destination on our tour of Europe’s tiny kingdoms—Andorra. We’ll be visiting four tiny kingdoms, or **microstates**, in this volume of *A Child’s Geography*; two now and two later.

A microstate is a small independent country recognized as such by the larger countries that surround it. A microstate is different from a **micronation**, which is an entity that *claims* to be an independent nation, but is not officially recognized by world governments.

Enough of definitions, let’s get on our way. Our first stop is Andorra, which is nestled between Spain and France high in the Pyrenees Mountains.



Topographical map of Andorra by Eric Gaba, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

Later in this chapter, after we explore Andorra, we'll travel to Monaco on the French Riviera. Then, in Chapter 13, we'll visit the other two, the ones with strange names that start with L—Liechtenstein and Luxembourg.

There is no way to get to Andorra, except to drive (and drive). There are no train stations and no airports in this tiny kingdom, so let's turn on some music and enjoy the scenery as we wind our way to the top of a ridge that overlooks the mountain-ringed basin where an ancient tribe has endured for centuries.

Andorra, also known as the Principality of the Valleys of Andorra, was created as an independent state in AD 988 and is the sixth smallest country in Europe. It contains 180 square miles of land and 75,000 people. This little country sits high in the craggy Pyrenees Mountains, almost hidden from its neighbors, Spain and France, and yet still controlled by them in many ways. Andorra is a **monarchy** headed by two co-princes, the Bishop of Urgell from Spain and the President of France. Nevertheless, locals insist that their land is completely independent from both of their big neighbors.

Get an idea of the size of Andorra by comparing it to your home country:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>



Pedraforca in the Pyrenees Mountains, public domain image taken by Mikipons, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

The country has a long history. The Andorrans' national anthem tells how Charlemagne rescued their land from the Moors in AD 803. Later, in the 13th century, French and Spanish royalty married and agreed that this little land, nestled high in the mountains, would be neither Spanish nor French. Curiously, this unique **feudal** agreement created between kings long dead survives today.

Andorrans speak Catalan, which is the language of Barcelona in Spain. The population of Andorra increased tenfold following World War II. However, most of the residents are immigrants, moving here from neighboring European countries.

Until little more than a generation ago, Andorra was an impoverished and isolated country. The mountains kept the principality separated from the rest of Europe and poor. Now, those very mountains that once isolated Andorra are contributing to the wealth of the nation. Hiking and skiing have become big business, drawing people from all over the world to hike through the beautiful mountains and ski down the powdery slopes. They also come for **duty-free** shopping. (Duty-free means that purchases are not subject to import or export taxes.)

To encourage tourists to come to Andorra, the country has eliminated sales tax and decreased many other taxes as well. Now the capital city, Andorra la Vella, has become a massive shopping mall that encompasses most of the city. This is a shopper's paradise. You can buy everything from electronics to jewelry to furs here in Andorra la Vella.

I'm not much of a shopper, are you? I suggest that we get out of the big city, or giant mall, and see some of the higher valleys and rugged outlying towns. Most of the tiny towns are made entirely of stone and encircle thousand-year-old churches that still stand as proudly as the Pyrenees Mountains that surround them.

With Andorra's current economic boom, many new buildings are gracing the landscape, but these buildings are constructed with the same local rustic stone to fit right into their ancient surroundings.

While it may be difficult to get to Andorra, it's not difficult to get around once inside the country. And it is a lot more fun! We have a couple of unique choices for transportation around the countryside. We



Charlemagne, oil by Louis-Felix Amiel, 1837.

can either mush our way by dogsled or travel in a 14-person Swedish caterpillar. Whichever option we choose, we will be able to see parts of Andorra that you could never see by car, such as **glaciers**, ice caves, and the peaks of mountain ridges.

Here you can see what the Gicafer caterpillar ride is like:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>



Gicafer caterpillar, public domain image taken by David Domingo, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

I vote for the Gicafer. We will stay warmer in the enclosed cabin of the **amphibious** vehicle. Outside the picture windows, we can see the spectacular mountains and the ski resorts clinging to their slopes. Resort guests can choose downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, or freeriding, where snowboarders are not attached to their boards. Freeriding is a wild and daring sport so certain sections of the mountains are especially cordoned off for freeriders to enjoy their sport in a safe and controlled environment.

After our glorious ride through the mountains and our hike through the sparkling ice caves, there are a couple more activities that we can choose from before we end our day in the quaint little country of Andorra. We could choose to snowshoe through the woods on fluffy white unmarked snow, or perhaps we would prefer to find our footing and our balance at Airtrekk, the largest sky trail in Europe.

Airtrekk is an airborne circuit meant to both thrill and defy those who accept the challenge. The wooden structure is a maze of trails 13.5 meters off the ground, grouped into three levels of difficulty.

Explore Medieval Kingdoms

Test your balance and your limits as you climb ropes, scale gangways and ascend to high platforms. But don't worry; we'll be completely safe, thanks to safety guides and a fall-proof harness. I think I'm game to try it. How about you?

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>



Airtrekk Naturlandia, photo used with permission from www.naturlandia.ad.

After the hair-raising trek across the exhilarating sky trail, I am ready for a hearty meal. Andorrans are famous for their grilling expertise. This ski lodge looks like the ideal spot to sample some Andorran barbeque. Outside, on the open fire, there is a selection of trout, beef, and... What are those little round delicacies? The grill-master explains that these are snails fed on a diet of thyme. He says that they are the tastiest snails we will ever eat.

What do you think... will you try some? They are expensive, but one is not offered tasty, thyme-fed snails to munch every day. As for me, I think I'll try the trout. After dinner, we need to get some rest at the lodge. Tomorrow, we leave the snowy mountains and head for the sunny coast to the miniature country by the sea—Monaco.

Before we leave our comfy table, we hear a folk singer striking up a tune on his guitar. To delight the international diners, he sings a funny little song about Andorra to start the evening's entertain-

ment. Pete Seeger recorded the song when he visited Andorra in 1962. The songwriter was struck by something he learned about the little country during his visit. He decided it was worth writing a song about.

Listen in here:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>

So, what do Andorra and the rest of Europe's little countries have in common? Many offer low or no taxes, which encourages businesses and individuals from other countries to come and support their economy. Each one has survived centuries of warfare, treaties, and reshaped borders— usually thanks to a combination of diplomatic skill and luck. All of them get by on the coattails of larger nations. Most of them are located high in the mountains or some other hard-to-reach place. And because they are small, they are easy to overlook, avoiding the notice of the next big tyrant. And that is why Andorra still exists today.

Tell me what you remember about...



Andorra by @SergeyNovikov, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

Geography:

What two countries is Andorra located between? Can you tell me what a microstate is? What is the difference between a microstate and a micronation?

Tell me about three things that Andorra has in common with the rest of Europe's little countries.

Thrills and Adventure:

Name two ways to travel in Andorra. How would you like to travel through this country and why?

What things might you see in Andorra on a trip in a Gicafer that you wouldn't be able to see in a car? Describe what it might be like riding in a Gicafer.

Would you like to try Andorra's Airtrekk? I think it looks like a fun way to spend an afternoon! Would you try the thyme-fed snails? They look delicious!



Monaco: Cars, Casinos, and Cousteau

Since Monaco is a sea town, it seems fitting that we should travel there by boat. It takes about seven hours to drive from Andorra to Monaco, and probably just as long to ride the ferry, but traveling by ferry is more exciting than driving, don't you think? The port of Barcelona is 2000 years old, which means they have water travel down to a science. We'll board our ferry there and sail northeast along the coast of France until we reach Monaco.

France surrounds Monaco on three sides and the Mediterranean Sea outlines its final side. This means that Monaco is not technically an enclave because it borders the sea. Do you remember what an enclave is? We learned about two of them in the third volume of *A Child's Geography* when we traveled through Italy—San Marino and Vatican City. Both of these countries are entirely surrounded by another country. And in Chapter One, we learned about two enclave cities that belong to Spain—Ceuta and Melilla—that are surrounded by Morocco. Monaco, however, is not a true enclave; it doesn't fit the definition.

Monaco is the second smallest country in the world. It is just a speck on the map of Europe. The only country smaller than Monaco is Vatican City, which is tucked away inside the city of Rome in Italy. Monaco is less than one square mile, or .78 square miles to be exact. Have you ever walked a mile? It takes about twenty minutes to walk a mile, so that's how long it would take to walk from one side of Monaco to the other. That's how small it is.



Port and city of Monaco, public domain image taken by Toby 87, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

However, this confetti-sized principality is the most densely populated country in the world. That means that the Monégasque people have successfully crammed more residents into their little space—36,000 residents—than any other country has fit into theirs per square mile. Mongolia, a country in Asia, is the least densely populated country in the world with less than two residents per square mile, in case you were wondering.

As we ferry along the coast of France, we can bask in the lovely Mediterranean climate. This part of the world is renowned for its glorious weather. Situated in the heart of Europe’s “Riviera,” Monaco enjoys more than 300 days of sunshine per year. While winter temperatures may become cooler, it is rarely cold here. Spring **mistral** winds create crystal clear skies, but the loveliest season to holiday in Monaco is autumn. The hot spells of summer have passed, but the comfortably warm weather continues through October.

Ah, there it is... the Port of Monaco. You may notice something uncommon here. Small ships, known as “super yachts” crowd the port. These elegant vessels are privately owned by the rich and famous who vacation in Monaco.

Due to its size and dense population, Monaco does not produce any crops or natural resources. And yet, over 48,000 people commute from France and Italy to work here. Monaco has the highest population of millionaires and billionaires per capita in the world. How do they produce their wealth? It is tourism that drives Monaco’s economy. High priced real estate and luxury banking also keep the money flowing through Monaco.

Monaco draws an extremely wealthy crowd. With its world famous casino, fancy restaurants, and Grand Prix Raceway, this tiny country is notorious for its fast cars and high life. But there is more to see here than just super yachts, Lamborghinis, and Blackjack tables. I think this little kingdom will fascinate you.

Monaco is an old country, established during the feudal era of the 12th century. It has changed little in its governmental structure over the centuries. Prince Albert II rules the country of Monaco. He is the son of Prince Rainier III and Princess Grace, better known as the American actress, Grace Kelly.

In fact, it was the marriage of Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier III of Monaco that put Monaco on the map. Monaco dates back nearly 800 years and has long been labeled on the world map, but it wasn't until this royal wedding in the 1950's that most people had ever heard of it.

And what a fairy tale wedding it was! Grace Kelly was introduced to the Prince of Monaco during the Cannes Film Festival in 1954. A friendship grew between them and a few months later, he flew out to California to see her again. Everyone was speculating that Rainier was looking for a bride, because the Constitution of Monaco, revised in 1918, stipulated that if a reigning prince did not produce an heir, the country would become absorbed by France. The fate of his small but independent country lay precariously in his hands.

This strange provision was written into the constitution during the First World War. Because of its prime location on the Mediterranean Sea, leaders of Europe feared that without strong leadership, Monaco would be overtaken by Germany and used as a military base by *the* enemy, ideally situated to be a thorn in France's side.



Grace Kelly of Monaco, public domain image.

And so Rainier searched for and found his bride, a beautiful and elegant actress from America, who gave up her acting career to become the princess of the smallest monarchy in the world. It was almost like a fairy tale.

Their wedding was considered the wedding of the century and her dress the most elegant bridal gown ever designed. Over 50 years after the grand celebration, Grace Kelly's stylish gown became the inspiration for the wedding dress worn by Kate Middleton, now Princess Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, future Queen of England. Her marriage to Prince William in 2011 was the notable royal wedding of the following century.

Let's walk through Monaco and see the sights. It is pointless to drive in this country, as it takes longer to find a place to park than to walk to your destination. The raceway of the Monaco Grand Prix winds up through the city and along the coastal cliffs. We can walk along it and up to the top of the rocky cliff. What a spectacular view of the charming city and the sparkling sea!

Let's watch a portion of the Monaco Grand Prix:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>



Monaco Grand Prix, public domain image taken by thesun, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

You can see that while much of the city is new and glitzy, there are some quaint old quarters of town. There is the picturesque Monaco-Ville, still a medieval village in many ways with its narrow pedestri-

an streets and passageways. The fortress on the top of the cliff is now a multi-storied aquarium, once directed by the legendary Jacques Cousteau.

And of course, a visit to Monaco would not be complete without a tour of the Palais Princier, the residence of the reigning prince. Every day at precisely 11:55 a.m., something special happens in front of the palace's main entrance. With great pomp and circumstance, fitting for a much larger kingdom, the Carabiniers, the personal security guards and escorts to the Prince himself, perform the changing of the guard ceremony.

It is nearly time! We can watch it now:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-andorra-monaco-ch4/>



That felt important, didn't it? The Monégasque people take their government and their history very seriously. In 1215, Monaco was founded as a colony of the powerful **city-state** of Genoa, which is now part of Italy. The Greeks had already named this region "Monaco" (which means "single house"), because their ancient myths told of Hercules dwelling here. The Port Hercule, also named for Hercules, is the largest port in Monaco.

Then, in 1297, a man by the name of François Grimaldi of Italy, along with the men he commanded, captured the fortress protecting the Rock of Monaco while dressed as Franciscan monks. Interestingly, the word monk in Italian is "monaco" but the country was not named after the cunning Grimaldi "monk" who overthrew it, even though it has been ruled by the House of Grimaldi ever since. There, you can see the statue of François Grimaldi in the palace courtyard, honoring the man who used trickery to capture a nation and make it his own.

The struggle over “The Rock” continued for another century until the Grimaldi’s purchased it by title and deed from the House of Aragon of Spain in 1419. The issue of its independence was never questioned until the French Revolution when France took control of Monaco. Less than twenty years later, Monaco regained its independence and has remained a separate country ever since. It is recognized as a country by the **European Union**, although it is not a member of it.

Spin around in one slow 360-degree turn to take in this exclusive view. The Monte Carlo, the casino that is the main attraction here, is not the most appropriate place for kids, so I think that is all we will see of Monaco today. We’ll grab a small bite to eat before we begin our next adventure through France. Our bite will be small because the food here, along with everything else, is extremely expensive. But Monaco has some of the world’s best fougasse, a sweet orange-infused pastry topped with nuts and anise seeds. Sound delicious? Let’s try some!

Next stop, France. Are you excited? I am! Let’s go!

Tell me what you remember about...

What country and sea borders Monaco? Explain why Monaco isn’t really an enclave. Do you remember how big Monaco is? How many people live here? Only one country is smaller; what is it?

What famous wedding put Monaco on the map? Why was it important for the prince to marry and produce an heir?

*Which city-state founded Monaco?
Who used trickery to capture this country and how? Which family has ruled Monaco since 1419?*

*Choose an adventure!
Would you rather spend your day as a Grand Prix driver, a princess, or a castle guard? Tell me about your day!*



Sweet pastries from Monaco image by Petr Kratochvil, public domain



France, Pt I

The Blue Jewel on the Mediterranean

From Monaco, it won't take us long to get to our next destination... France! In fact, if we walk less than half a mile to the north, east, or west, we will find ourselves in France. Just don't head south or you'll wind up in the Mediterranean Sea!

We'll go west because if we go more than five miles to the east, we'll be in Italy and we have already explored that captivating land in volume three of *A Child's Geography*.

Three coastal roads traverse this region's breathtaking coastline—the Low, Middle, and High Corniche. A **corniche** is a road that has been carved into the edge of a cliff that typically runs along the coast. The Low Corniche strings together the ports and beaches along the waterfront. Further up



into the hills, large and impressive villas of the rich and famous bejewel the Middle Corniche. The Grande, or High, Corniche runs along the top of the cliffs and provides stunning views of the vast Mediterranean Sea. The Grande Corniche runs on top of the ancient Via Aurelia, a road built by the Romans as they pressed further and further west from Italy.

Less than three miles west of Monaco along the Low Corniche [kore-neesh] is Villefranche-sur-Mer, which means “the village without taxes on the sea.”

Villefranche is like a colorful bead on the coastal necklace of Southern France that locals call the Côte d'Azur [kote-da-zewr] (which means Blue Coast). Tourists call it the French Riviera.

With its steep, narrow streets and buildings in every velvety shade of orange, the snug port town of Villefranche feels more Italian than French. That's because this stretch of coastline, in fact, the entire region of Provence, has gone back and forth between Italian and French rule. Perhaps, we should pop into this little café and enjoy a plate of pasta, an Italian comfort food and regional specialty.

High above Villefranche, upon the towering cliffs, is the medieval town of Eze. The thick town wall and massive gate were built to keep out pirates. When the townsfolk below felt threatened by menacing pirates from the sea, they would escape to the high ground and find refuge there. Climb a little higher still and we come to the ruins of the Eze Château, a once mighty fortress that offered the townspeople an even greater level of protection.



The town of Nice on the French Riviera, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

As we continue west two miles down the road, we come to the larger town of Nice (pronounced “niece”) and millions of people from around the world think that this town is indeed very nice! The biggest town on the Côte d'Azur, Nice is the vacation hot spot for locals and tourist alike. Its miles of sunny beaches and deliciously warm Mediterranean water draw beach-lovers like a magnet.



The Lower Corniche, public domain image taken by trialsanderrors, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

Its popularity began back in the 1800s. Aristocrats from all over the world, from London to Moscow, would flock to France's sunny southern shore to socialize, live the high life, and escape the dreary weather up north.

While an afternoon at the beach sounds like the perfect way to spend the day, that is not all there is to do in Nice. Many famous European artists from the 20th century chose to live and work in this sea town because of the picturesque promenade, the beautiful people, and the play of light on the turquoise water—artists such as Henri Matisse, Marc Chagall, and Pablo Picasso. We can see their sun-dappled paintings in the many world-class museums open to the public here in Nice.

And just over there is the beautiful Russian Orthodox Church that was built by Tsar Nicholas II for the 500 wealthy Russian families who wintered in Nice and needed a suitable place to worship. While the church's distinctly Russian onion-shaped dome looks out of place on the French Mediterranean coast, it must have been a comforting place of worship for the Russian families who were so far from home.

Next in line along the Lower Corniche is Cannes. Cannes is world renowned for its international film festival. It is probably not surprising that her sister city is Beverly Hills, California, also a movie town.



The Cannes Harbor on the French Riviera, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

The city of Cannes [kahn] has hosted the world-famous Cannes Film Festival every May since 1946. I, for one, am glad it's not May! During the festival, this little city is jammed with celebrities, film producers, and **paparazzi** determined to capture a front-page shot.

Let's leave the touristy French Riviera behind and head inland, further into the heart of Provence. The region of Provence was the first Roman province established beyond Italy's natural northwestern border, the mighty Alps. They named it simply, *Provincia Romana*, or Roman Province, which is how the region got its modern name. From ancient times until 1481, it was ruled by the Counts of Provence from their capital city, Aix-en-Provence [ex-ahn-pro-vahns], until it became part of France. While more than 500 years have elapsed since it became French territory, this region still retains a distinct cultural and linguistic identity, especially in the very heart of Provence. It has even retained its own language—Provençal (also known as Occitan), which is more similar to the language spoken in Barcelona, Spain—Catalan—than it is to French.

Let's drive up to the Gorge du Verdon. It is not far from here. This **gorge** is world famous and considered to be the "French Grand Canyon." Through the valley of the canyon flows the Verdon River, named for its startling turquoise-green color. Verdon means "green" in French. The ravine is 700



Gorge du Verdon, France, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

meters (2300 ft) deep with steep limestone walls reaching up from the canyon floor. This is an outdoorsman's paradise. Bicyclists, hikers, kayakers, and rock-climbers flock to the Gorge du Verdon to test their skills against nature in this breathtaking canyon.

Arriving at the eastern rim just before sundown, we see the silhouette of a bicyclist at the gorge's edge. He appears to be basking in the beauty of his surroundings.

"Bonjour," we greet him as we approach the edge of the canyon.

"Bonjour!" he replies. "Isn't today a great day to be alive? As I am standing here looking out at all of this," he gestures with his arms toward the great expanse, "I realize how small I am, but I am grateful to have eyes to take it all in. God has created a glorious world for us to enjoy."

Quietly, we enjoy the view spread out before us and marvel at the color of the water below.

Not wanting to interrupt the man's delight in the panoramic landscape, I wait until he looks like he is about ready to cycle away before asking him, "Are you from around here? Pardon me for saying so, but



you don't sound French."

"Nor do you!" he laughs. "No, I am from the States. I am biking through southern Europe for two months."

"Wow, that's impressive. Where have you been so far and where are you going next?"

"We—my friends are just over there—started our bike tour in the Basque Country—San Sebastian, to be exact. From there, we biked up into the Pyrenees Mountains and into the tiny country of Andorra. Then, we descended those mountains into France, near Carcassonne. Have you heard of it?"

"We've been to San Sebastian and Andorra, but not to Carcassonne. We will travel there soon, though. How did you like it?" I ask.

"Oh my goodness, it is fantastic. You will love it. It is the oldest walled city in France. So medieval and yet so well preserved. Definitely spend some time there if you can."

How wonderful to speak with a fellow adventurer who appreciates history and geography. He excitedly tells us about other highlights that he has enjoyed so far on his trip and where he plans to go next. He is heading for the French and Italian Riviera and then on to Verona, Florence, and Rome in Italy. What a grand adventure!

We wish him safety and good travels as he joins up with his friends and continues his ride.

We too will continue our journey through the province of Provence in southern France. Traveling west, the way the Romans did back when they were establishing their foothold in this part of Europe, we'll go past the sea town of Marseille, which was inhabited long before the Romans found it. Just off

the shore of Marseille is a cave where ancient drawings of bison, seals, horses, and humans have been found etched into the walls. Here's the mysterious part... the cave's entrance is 37 meters (121 feet) below the Calanque de Morgiou [ka-lank-duh-mor-ji-oo]. A **calanque** is a steep-walled inlet or cove formed out of water-soluble rock, dolomite or limestone, found along the **karstic** coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

This area is known for a few other landmarks as well, namely Château d'If, the island prison a mile off the coast of Marseille that Alexander Dumas wrote about in his book, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. This mighty island fortress is no longer used as a prison, but it continues to stand strong against the rough seas and mistral winds that whip up during the winter and spring, buffeting its northwestern coast. There is an old saying that the mistral winds can blow the ears off a donkey! I hope there are no donkeys at Château d'If!

Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

What is a corniche? Who originally created the Grande or High Corniche? Villefranche-sur-Mer lies along the Low Corniche in the French Riviera; what does its name mean? What is another name for the French Riviera? Why does Villefranche feel more Italian than French?

Beaches and Berets:

How did the city of Nice become so popular? Relaxing on a sunny beach sounds like a great way to spend the afternoon! Which famous artists lived and worked in this city?

Language:

Tell me how the region of Provence was named and by who? What other language that we learned about is similar to Provençal or Occitan?



Chateau d'If, public domain image taken by Yann Droneaud, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

A Snapshot of the Past

If we continue further west, we will leave the bustling province of Provence and enter the sleepy province of Languedoc. Languedoc means “the language of Oc” which is short for Occitan. Occitan, or Provençal, is the ancient language spoken in these parts. It has been spoken here since before the Roman Empire began to gobble up the area. Many residents still speak it, but in the last hundred years, it has been spoken less and less. Now, it is beginning to regain popularity as the people of Languedoc and Provence make an effort to embrace their ancient linguistic roots and cultural heritage in this little corner of the world, apart from their national French identity.

Politically, France is divided into 27 administrative regions. But France is also divided into provinces. These are more like cultural divisions than political boundaries. The provinces of France have been formed over the course of many hundreds of years as dozens of tiny countries and kingdoms bonded together to become incorporated into the French royal domain in the late 18th century.

Because each of these little fiefdoms had their own set of feudal laws, courts, and traditions, the central government in Paris around the time of the French Revolution wished to remove the influence of the local French nobility from their provinces to help form a strong central government.



The Arena at Nîmes, public domain image by Wolfgang Staudt, License CC BY-SA 2.0.



The Pont du Gard, public domain image taken by Ben Lieu Song, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

Ultimately, the old provincial system was abolished in favor of departments, or regions, which are still in use today. Sometimes it gets confusing, though, because the modern regions often share names with the historic provinces. Their borders may even cover roughly the same territory.

So while we are in the province of Languedoc, we are technically in the region, or department of, Languedoc-Roussillon. This area is an interesting little corner of France with some big sites to see.

The first town we come to in the department of Languedoc-Roussillon is Nîmes. Nîmes was once a mighty Roman city; in fact, many Roman remains still stand. The best-preserved **aqueduct** and arena from the entire Roman Empire, that spanned three continents, are found right here in Nîmes, France. While the aqueduct no longer carries water and the arena no longer hosts gladiator fights, these monuments still tell the stories of an ancient people who were both ingenious and ambitious.

The Pont du Gard is a perfectly preserved Roman bridge, which supported the aqueduct that ran along the top, transporting much-needed water into the important city of Nîmes. We can go inside the aqueduct to see how it worked.

This 30-mile long man-made channel flowed with water for 400 years and we can see the thick mineral build-up that accumulated along the walls from centuries of use. The main arch of the Pont du Gard is the largest arch the Roman's ever built—80 yards across—and they didn't even use mortar to hold the stones together! The arch is held together by gravity that pulls the angled stones against each other, making it sturdy. Remarkably, the aqueduct was built in such a way that the water level dropped a scant inch for every 350 feet of channel to control the speed of the water flow.

Within the city of Nîmes itself resides the Nîmes Arena, the best-preserved arena from ancient Rome. This arena is in much better condition than the Colosseum and even better than the Arena in Verona,

Italy. The Arena in Nîmes is another well-preserved example of Roman engineering and Roman propaganda. The emperor required that admission to all events at the Arena be free of charge because he wanted all citizens of the empire, especially those in the outermost regions, to feel thoroughly “Roman” by enjoying the same entertainment as the citizens of Rome.

While gladiator fights are a thing of the distant past, this arena still hosts Man vs. Beast competitions. Today, the animals of choice are bulls. However, a bullfight “à la Provençale” is more sporting than the bloody Spanish bullfights. The goal of the bullfighters in this spectacle is to remove a tiny ribbon laced onto the horns on the bull’s forehead. After an evening of agile bullfighters doing the tango with the feisty bull, the beast prances proudly out of the arena, living on to “fight” another day.

Let’s grab a bite to eat. There is a quaint little café just outside the arena. With all of these wonderful choices on the menu, what will you have? I will try the ratatouille. Ratatouille is a traditional Provençal dish that originated in the town of Nice, but it is served throughout this region as well. The French word *touille* means to “toss food.” Ratatouille was originally a meal made by poor farmers who didn’t have much meat. It is assembled with thinly sliced zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers, onion, garlic, and eggplant. Would you like to try some?

If you are not a fan of vegetables, perhaps you would like to try one of the seafood soups that this corner of the world is famous for, such as bourride, a fish soup with potatoes, or bouillabaisse, a broth served over a beautiful assortment of shellfish. People travel across the world for this fabulous cuisine. After the main dish, you are sure to enjoy one of the delicious desserts, oui?

Looking around, it seems that everyone here is drinking a glass of wine. The waiters are pouring wine as if it were water. In fact, it is cheaper to buy wine here than bottled water.

“Excuse me,” I ask the waiter. “Why are so many people drinking wine?”

“It is the French way! It is also because this region produces some of the finest wines in the world at the smallest prices.”

“But why is the wine so affordably priced here?” I ask curiously.



The wine of Languedoc, image by Marc Chabot, License CC BY-SA 3.0.



Lavender fields in Provence, public domain image by Andyblind, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

“Ah yes, it is a simple case of supply and demand. Let me explain... I’ll give you a mini-economics lesson, if you do not mind. You see, this corner of France grows and bottles 1/3 of all of the wine produced in France. In fact, Languedoc produces one out of every ten bottles of wine in the world, earning the nickname ‘Wine Lake.’ There is not actually a lake here, but we are rather drowning in wine,” he chuckles. “We have so much wine that we cannot sell it all. There is not enough demand for the wine, which means that the supply is so high that the prices stay very low.”

A classic case of supply and demand... That makes sense, but I will stick with my expensive bottled water for now.

Sitting here, in this little outdoor café, with the massive arena rising up on the other side of the cobblestone courtyard, it feels as though time has stood still. We can see and touch the remains of an ancient civilization through the Roman architecture that was built here 2,000 years ago. We can eat the food of kings and peasants along a medieval street, sitting upon chairs that have been worn down for a hundred years or more. Life seems to move slowly in these little French provincial towns, while the modern world whizzes by at breakneck speed.

We have so much yet to see and learn about in this complex country, but for now it is good to sit and savor our soup on this sunny day in the south of France.



Map of Languedoc, public domain image by Globe, Picassa Web.

Let's pull out our maps as we board our next train. The region of Languedoc-Roussillon makes a pudgy upside-down L on the lower portion of our map. Our next stop is Carcassonne and our train will make a beeline to the medieval fortress town, cutting a straight line through the colorful fields of southern France. Take a seat there by the window so that you can enjoy the scenery as we speed through it. There are fields upon fields of silvery purple lavender and row upon row of sunflowers with lazy bending heads. The busy bees are buzzing cheerfully in the sunny south.

The South of France enjoys a moderate climate, meaning that it doesn't get too

hot and it doesn't get too cold. It is just right for growing vegetables, herbs, flowers, grapes, and olives. Can you believe that it used to be illegal to grow grapes and olives here back in Roman times? The Roman government did not want the superior wine and olive oil of this region to compete with their Italian varieties.

Rolling hills are rising up on both sides of the valley and ahead you can see the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains. Surprisingly, we are nearly back to Andorra, that little country on the border between Spain and France, but we will debark from our train in Carcassonne before we get that far. Besides, we already learned that trains don't travel through Andorra.

Carcassonne is located on a small hilltop above the Aude plain. Because of its strategic location between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, it became an important trading post for the Romans before it was captured by the Visigoths from the south and later the Franks, the barbarian tribe from the north.

To block attacks from neighboring kingdoms and warring tribes, the medieval fiefdom of Carcassonne built a big thick wall around the city. Eventually, it became known as a mighty refuge and various groups of people began to hide out within its walls. One such group was the Cathars, a small religious sect fleeing from persecution by the Catholic Church, who believed them to be "the church of Satan." The Cathars found a temporary sanctuary here, until they were discovered and cast out from the city walls.

While Carcassonne has enjoyed a long history and has bounced back and forth between mighty empires, it remains one of the best-preserved medieval fortress towns in the world.

We'll enter through its wide gates and under its thick **ramparts**. Let's stroll through its cobbled streets that have endured the test of time. Yes, you can meander through countless medieval towns throughout Europe, but none with so great a wall still intact encircling it and protecting it from the modern world outside.

And now, my friends, it is time for another adventure. Grab a snack from your pack and let's head north, across the Dordogne River and up to the very northwest corner of France to Brittany.

Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

How many administrative regions is France divided into?

History:

Who established the city of Nimes? Tell me about the remains of Rome that still stand in this city. Why was the main arch of the Pont du Gard so strong even without mortar? Why do you think Carcassonne has stayed so well-preserved given its history of bouncing back and forth between empires?

Food and Drink:

Do you think you would like to try the dish ratatouille? How is it made? Why is this region nicknamed "Wine Lake"? How does supply and demand affect the prices of things that you buy in stores in your city?







France, Pt II

A Land of Stone and Sea

France is a large country. In fact, it is the largest country in Europe and is about the size of Texas in the United States. So it will take several hours to get from the south of France to the northwest corner, even on a **bullet train**.

As we speed through the countryside, we can see and enjoy the untouched corners of this mighty nation. Little French towns, tucked away in corners along the hillside or perfectly placed along a peaceful stretch of river, give the appearance of a place that time has not touched. Life goes on here much as it did hundreds of years ago. The rooftops are covered with real stone shingles called *lauzès* [law-zay], the farmers still take their sheep out to pasture, and the cheese-makers still make cheese by hand, the way they have done for centuries.

The Dordogne [door-dohn-yuh] River cuts the western part of France in half. Six centuries ago, this lazy, tranquil river separated the warring armies of England and France. They fought over this region for so long—more than a hundred years—the struggle became known as the Hundred Years' War.

During the Middle Ages, the noble family who ruled the Dordogne region lived in the Castle of Beynac, which



The Castle of Beynac, image by Manfred Heyde, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

today appears to be perfectly placed beside the peaceful river. However, during the Hundred Years' War, which raged from 1337 to 1453, Beynac found itself terribly located on the front lines of battle. During the endless years of fighting, the castle and the surrounding town were passed back and forth several times between English and French control. Nobility would negotiate peace treaties in the great room of the Château de Beynac and then the decision would be pronounced to the peasants in the courtyard below.

The lord of the castle would proclaim, "We belong to France," or "We belong to England." The destiny of the people of this region rested in the hands of those who held the greatest power at that moment in history.

Also, above the Dordogne River is a honeycomb of caves in the limestone cliffs known as Lascaux. The river has carved out numerous caverns and ledges within the soft, water-soluble limestone. Ancient people lived and found refuge from their enemies within the fissures of the rock. Ancient paintings in the caves indicate that people were living here long before the building of Stonehenge in England or the Pyramids of Egypt. These paintings are not crude drawings either, but detailed depictions of what



The Cave of Lascaux, public domain image taken by Bayes Ahmed, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

life was like thousands of years ago. More recent carvings suggest that these caves were used again, much later, when medieval townspeople escaped here to seek refuge from Viking marauders who routinely trolled up the Dordogne River around AD 976.

This region has certainly seen its share of war and turmoil. But today, there is no place on earth more peaceful. With kayakers paddling up and down the slow-moving river and flocks of geese grazing upon the banks, this is idyllic France at its best.

Today, we are meeting up with a friend of a friend. Even though we haven't yet met in person, Morgayne, along with her husband, Venec, are happy to join us this afternoon to show us some of the spectacular sites in Brittany. I have a hunch that we will have two new friends in France before the end of the day.

We switched trains in Nantes from the high-speed TGV train to a regional train that is now pulling into Vannes. After we debark from the train, we see a young couple waving to us. Morgayne and Venec greet us with friendly air kisses on both cheeks.

"How is my dear friend, Michele?" Morgayne asks. Her voice is like music! Her Breton accent lets us know that we are in a unique corner of France. It is almost like a cross between a French accent and a Scottish **brogue**.

"She is well! And she asks about you, too."

We exchange pleasantries for a couple of minutes and then Venec, Morgayne's tall and exuberant husband, breaks in, "Well, do you want to see the beauty of Brittany, or would you rather just chaw about it?"

We smile and say, "Let's go!"

"The Carnac Stones are very close to here. Let's start there," says Morgayne. A quick drive in their little coupe brings us to the world famous site of the Carnac Stones.

"People travel to England from every part of the globe to admire the astonishing sight of Stonehenge. But what most people don't realize is that Brittany has the largest collection of **megaliths** in the world. There are more than 3,000 erected stone monuments hewn from local rock in and around the village of Carnac.

"No one knows why they are here, but these rock monuments have been standing tall for probably 5,000 years, most likely erected around 3300 BC during the **Neolithic** period. The early Christians



Carnac Stones from above, public domain image taken by Marek.69, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

and the Romans before them had created myths around these peculiar stones. One myth says that the rocks were pagan soldiers pursuing Pope Cornelius. The soldiers were divinely turned into stone before they could catch him. Another story tells of Merlin, from the Arthurian legends, turning an entire Roman legion to stone. Both of these myths attempt to explain why the rocks are aligned in perfect military formation.”

“I am confused,” I confess. “I thought that the legend of Arthur was purely British. Why are the people of France telling stories of Merlin and Arthur?”

“Oh, it is not that simple!” Venec’s face lights up with a wide grin. It is obvious that he loves to talk about the Breton people and their history in this part of the world.

“Years ago, Brittany was called Lesser or Little Britain (as opposed to Great Britain). The word ‘Brittany’ comes from the same Latin root as Britain—Britannia—which means the ‘Britons’ Land.’ After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, about 2,000 years ago, many Britons from England sailed across the English Channel and settled here on the mainland, pushing the Romans back to Italy. The region became known as Britannia Minor, and the island of England became Britannia Major. We all come from the same stock, you see. Brittany is one of six Celtic nations and we are descendants of the Celts.

“That is why you get such a mix of cultures here that provide us with our unique identity. In some ways, Brittany is similar to other regions in France. The people here are mostly Catholic; we are fishermen and farmers; we cherish our traditional food, and we spend hours preparing and serving it. In other ways, we identify with our fellow Celtic nations. Our native Breton language is a Celtic tongue

most closely related to Cornish and Welsh, languages spoken by the people of Cornwall and Wales across the channel. We enjoy music played on bagpipes, drums, and the Celtic harp. And we tell tales of King Arthur, Morgan le Fay, and the Lady of the Lake, which we like to think is located right here in Brittany beside the ruins of an old castle.”

Venec winks and we hope that maybe he'll tell us some of those tales as we spend more time with them this evening here in beautiful Brittany.

Let's take some pictures among these ancient stones while the sunlight remains. Surely, we need to send a photo to our friends to show them what we have seen so far here in Brittany, the rugged northwest corner of France.

Brittany is the largest peninsula in France. If you pull out your maps and squint your eyes a bit, you might be able to see the profile of a man's face looking toward Great Britain across the English Channel. Some say that the shape of France resembles military general and President Charles de Gaulle who founded the French Fifth Republic in 1958. Brittany would be his chin or maybe his beard.

This region became part of the Roman Republic in 51 BC. Over the next thousand years, Brittany was attacked from every direction. In the 3rd century AD, Brittany was attacked by the barbarian Franks from the east and pirates from the south. Shortly after, the Britons from Wales and Cornwall migrated here and Brittany became an independent kingdom. Then, in the 10th century, the Vikings attacked fiercely from the north and west. For these reasons, the people of Brittany pledged their loyalty in 1066 to the newly crowned King of England, William the Conqueror, in exchange for his protection.



Medieval Brittany was much like the rest of Europe. **Feudalism** was the way of life. Tiny kingdoms and dukedoms were everywhere. The lord of a small kingdom would live in his castle, which his loyal knights would defend and protect. The peasants would farm the outlying fields, giving a portion of their crops to their liege lord and his household, in exchange for a cottage to live in, land to farm, and protection within the castle walls when necessary.

That is why you see castles, both ruined and restored, and **half-timbered** houses scattered throughout the rolling countryside. Brick was an expensive building material even for wealthy Bretons, so houses were framed with thick timbers that were left exposed in the plastered wall. This style of architecture is now commonly referred to as Tudor.

In 1532, Brittany became a province of the Kingdom of France, but it still governed itself as though it were a separate nation. The Bretons continued to speak their native languages—Breton and Gallo—which are closer to Scottish Gaelic than French. Nearly extinct, these languages are experiencing a revival and are being taught in school once again. Gallo is still often perceived as a poor **rural dialect** and so it is not getting passed as successfully from parents to children. It seems that it may die out after the older generations of Gallo-speaking Bretons pass away. How sad!

The sun is getting ready to set and so we will have to wait until tomorrow to finish our tour of Brittany. Venec and Morgayne would like us to stay at Morgayne's parent's bed and breakfast, a quaint half-timbered inn several miles to the north. Morgayne tells us that there are many picturesque places to spend the night *arvor* (which means "by the sea"), but there is nothing quite so magical as the villages and countryside *argoat* (by the forest).

So "argoat" it is! We hop into their car and drive away from the windswept coast and toward the fairytale interior of the Brittany peninsula. Venec turns off the highway and onto a long gravel driveway canopied by gnarled oak trees. We enter through the thick wooden front door of the charming country inn that was Morgayne's childhood home. Inside, the low wooden beams on the ceiling and the rough, textured walls are darkened slightly from age and the hundreds of fires that have roared in the hearth, like the one burning there now. Beautifully furnished with rich woods and vibrant fabrics,



this looks like the home of a medieval country squire and his well-to-do family.

Morgayne's parents are as charming as their inn. They burst from the kitchen with their arms wide, not stopping until they have greeted each of us with smiles and kisses on our cheeks. They only serve breakfast at the inn, so the meal they are preparing now is especially for us—a rustic, home-cooked meal for family and new friends.



Galettes, public domain image by Trizek, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

Tonight, galettes are on the menu. Galettes are the savory version of **crepes**, which originated right here in Brittany. They are made with hearty buckwheat flour and are traditionally served with cheese, sausages, bacon, mushrooms, or eggs. Tonight, they are filled with sausage, egg, and cheese.

Hot cider is served with a tray of freshly made, salted caramels. A platter of Butter Cake, a pastry that is a Breton specialty, is passed around the table. We linger over dinner and delightful conversation with our hosts.

We have had a wonderful afternoon and evening in Brittany! Our hosts graciously show us to our rooms, chatting about all the places we should explore on our way to Normandy tomorrow. They explain that because Brittany is bordered by the sea on three sides, its history is steeped in shipbuilding and maritime traditions. Several museums display giant **transatlantic** ships and demonstrate the traditions and skills necessary for shipbuilding throughout the centuries.

Tomorrow is shaping up to become a wonderfully full day. We'll visit a museum or two and then head for the historic region of Normandy, whose beaches were the site of the legendary D-Day invasion of World War II. It was one of the largest amphibious assaults of all time. We'd better get some sleep first!



Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

How have the caves above the Dordogne River served the people of the region over the years?

Culture:

Brittany has such a unique culture! What do you remember about the people? The food? The language of Breton? How did Brittany get its name?

History:

Feudalism was the way of life in medieval Brittany. How does feudalism work? Tell me what you remember about the Hundred Years' War. Over which region in France was this war fought? How did the Hundred Years' War get its name? What happened to the Castle of Beynac during the Hundred Years' War?



A Historic Land of Battles and Heroes

You've probably heard in the news about wars waged around the world. And you have certainly read about wars and battles in books. But often it seems that wars are fought someplace really far away—places whose names you may recognize, but cannot picture in your mind's eye. Today, we get an up-close look at some of the most legendary battlefields of all time.

We are on our way to Normandy in the northern part of France, just east of Brittany, and not too far from Paris, France's capital city. Normandy is a region that has experienced countless wars throughout the years. Because this region of France is just across the English Channel from England, the English and the French have fought over it for centuries. Over a thousand years ago, during the Dark Ages, Viking Norsemen raided and settled this land giving Normandy its name. William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy and a descendent of the Viking raiders, launched his invasion of England from these shores and became their new king. A few hundred years later, Normandy was caught in the middle of the conflict known as the Hundred Years' War and it was here in Normandy that Joan of Arc, a local girl from the town of Rouen, rallied the French troops against the English to win back their land.

But of all the battles and all the conflicts that have happened here in this little corner of the world, the most famous is the D-Day Invasion that turned the tide of World War II. It was an incredible but costly victory!



Mont St. Michel in Normandy, Adobe Stock Images, licensed for publication.

Everywhere you look in Normandy, there is evidence of past wars in the form of monuments and museums, but there is no sign of sadness or destruction or revenge. The people of Normandy are a robust and resilient people who love life while still embracing their tumultuous past. Let's go explore and experience some of this "joie de vivre" [jwah-duh-veevr]—love of life—in Normandy, France!

Just across the border of Brittany is Mont St. Michel and when I say "just across the border," I mean it. Mont St. Michel is an island on which an abbey was first built in the 8th century when hermit monks came here to meditate and pray in solitude. The island is located at the mouth of the Couesnon River, which has been the historic border between the lands of Brittany and Normandy. The interesting thing about this island is that when the tide receded, a **land bridge** would emerge that allowed monks and pilgrims alike to walk between the island and the mainland.

Because the island was in the middle of the river that defined the Brittany-Normandy border, Mont St. Michel was tossed back and forth between the Bretons and the Normans, who fought over it for

centuries. Then, in the late 1800's, a raised roadway was built connecting Mont St. Michel solidly to the Normandy side of France. Gone are the days when people would have to wait for the water to recede enough to walk across the mud flats to the island abbey. Imagine the urgency that pedestrians would feel crossing the soggy land that minutes ago was covered in water and would be covered again very soon. When the tide would return, it happened quickly. The sea was known to sweep in "at the speed of a galloping horse" urging travelers to make haste!

During the 1800's, Mont St. Michel was a tiny but bustling town with a population of over 1,000 residents. Today, less than 50 people live on the island, but over two million people visit the abbey each year. So, the island will be crowded today, as it is every day.

Let's snap some photos here from across the bay to capture the majesty of the grand abbey before the tide of tourists sweeps us along into the abbey walls. The island is so picturesque. It was a marvel in its day as it is now—a medieval skyscraper built upon a rock, crowned by a golden statue of St. Michael.

Throughout the years, this island has been protected by more than water. During the Middle Ages, thick fortified walls were built around the abbey to protect it against invaders. So even though the English conquered the rest of Normandy during the Hundred Years' War, they never occupied Mont St. Michel. We can walk on top of the wide walls to skirt the town with its crowds and wind our way up the ramparts to the church, which crowns the island. What a tremendous view of the sea on one side and Normandy on the other!

On to our next stop... Bayeux! We briefly learned about William the Conqueror and how he invaded England and became their king. The battle he fought on English soil is known as the Battle of Hastings and it happened in 1066, almost a thousand years ago. It's a very famous battle and significant to both the English and the French. History books and novels have retold the story for the past ten



Portions of the Bayeux Tapestry (both images), public domain image taken by Myrabella, License CC BY-SA 3.0.

centuries. But did you know that the events leading up to the battle were recorded a few years after the war in a series of images, in much the same way a comic strip might be drawn today? The events leading up to the war were embroidered in comic strip fashion on a long piece of cloth, 230 feet long, known as the Bayeux [bah-yuh] **Tapestry**. And it's located in the town of...? You guessed it! Bayeux. We're on our way there now.

The Bayeux Tapestry tells the incredible story of a pivotal event from the Middle Ages—the Battle of Hastings—through a series of carefully stitched images. If we need any help interpreting the images, subtitles were stitched onto the cloth too, but they are scripted in Latin. Here's how the story goes...

The opening scene depicts Edward, the King of England, sending his brother-in-law Harold to Normandy to pledge his loyalty to William, his cousin, the Duke of Normandy. On the way, Harold and his army become stuck in the mud outside Mont St. Michel. Upon his arrival, the reunited cousins fight together against the Bretons. Harold swears his allegiance to William, and William, in turn, bestows gifts upon Harold.

Harold returns to England and King Edward, only to find the king on his deathbed. King Edward is about to die without an heir to his throne. Upon his death, Harold is crowned king. A star with a streaming tail then appears in the night sky—Halley's Comet, most likely. (It was believed during the Middle Ages that comets were a bad **omen**.) The news of King Edward's death and Harold's **coronation** reaches Normandy. William, believing that Harold's earlier visit and **allegiance** to him meant that *he*, William, was supposed to become the next king, prepares an invasion. He readies his army, builds his ships, and fashions his weapons, so that he might sail across the English Channel and claim his rightful throne. William meets Harold at the town of Hastings in the year 1066 where they fight a fierce 14-hour battle. During combat, Harold is fatally wounded by an arrow to his eye.



The end of the tapestry has been torn off and lost, how much is unknown, but the end of the story is well known. William, now William the Conqueror, marches into London and claims the throne, becoming the first Norman King of England.

Fast-forward three hundred years... The year is 1428 and the English and the French have become embroiled in a battle that has lasted so long that generations have come and gone and the battle is still ongoing. In fact, it lasted well over 100 years—116 to be exact—and became known as the Hundred

Years' War. It all began when a woman, Isabella of France, unable to claim the throne for herself because of a decision twenty years prior that denied women the right to the French throne, claimed it for her son instead, who was not yet old enough to rule. The French nobility refused to acknowledge this claim, which led to the English swooping in to capture the crown for themselves. Thus, the battle for France began and continued as French lands swayed back and forth between French and English rule.

Interestingly, while a royal woman's selfish claim to the throne may have started the war, it was a teenage peasant girl's selfless leadership and love for her country that helped bring the war to an end.

Joan was born in a small village in northeast France. She was raised by peasants and lived a very ordinary and humble life in rural France outside the region where the fighting was taking place. When Joan was 13 years old, she started having dreams and visions of the archangel Saint Michael, instructing her to personally help the **dauphin**, Charles VII—the underage and uncrowned king of France—to win back



Joan of Arc by John Everett Millais, 1865, public domain image.

France for good and bring an end to the bloody war. (The dauphin [doh-fawn] was the title given to the heir of France. The word is French for dolphin, because the dolphin was depicted on their coat of arms.) Joan devoutly believed that she must do as instructed or she would be disobeying her Lord, which she surely could not do. Enlisting the aid of some officers in the



Statue of Joan of Arc, Rouen, Thinkstock Photos, licensed for publication.

army, she dressed as a soldier to journey through hostile territory and gain access to the heir, Charles VII. Charles was impressed by her vision, leadership and determination. He outfitted her for war and assigned her to lead his army at the Battle of Orléans. Her presence and leadership changed the tide of that battle and the French gained the upper hand.

Joan led several more battle campaigns throughout the Loire Valley and helped the French armies gain enough momentum to drive the English out of France. Joan and her family had the privilege of watching Charles VII crowned King of France at his coronation ceremony in Reims.

However, not long after the coronation ceremony, English soldiers captured Joan and she was sentenced to death. In the nearby city of Rouen, an English **stronghold** at the time, the English burned Joan at the stake for **heresy** and treachery. Twenty-two years later, she was declared a saint for her selfless devotion to her country and king.

In the quaint half-timbered medieval town of Rouen, there is a public square dedicated to Joan of Arc, who was just 19 at the time of her execution. Isn't it incredible how someone so young could play such a significant role in the events of her country and ultimately, in the history of the world?

While there have been other famous battles in France, especially those that were fought during the French Revolution and the first World War, we will end our tour of Normandy with one final but crucial battle that took place not far from here during World War II. Just six miles from the town of Bayeux on the northern coast of France is a point along the 50-mile stretch of coastline that marks the site of the largest amphibious invasion of all time. The D-Day Invasion occurred at dawn on June 6, 1944, when the Allied troops gained a foothold in France and began to chisel away at Nazi-controlled Europe.

The “D” in D-Day means “Day,” so D-Day literally means “Day-Day” or “this is *the* day.” June 6, 1944 marked the Day of the grand assault. On that Day, 156,000 American, British, and Canadian troops landed on five beaches along this stretch of coastline. From water to land, they crawled onto one of the most heavily fortified military outposts in France—the Normandy coast. On that Day, Allied soldiers courageously assaulted the German-occupied cliffs using ladders and **grappling hooks**. At the end of the Day, the Allies were victorious, but they suffered terrible losses. Over 10,000 Allied soldiers lost their lives along with twice as many Germans.

Within two months, Normandy and northern France were liberated from Nazi-German control and by the following spring, the war was officially over. What happened that Day during the Normandy landings has been called the beginning of the end of World War II.

Many significant wars and battles have been fought here in Normandy, yet this region of France embodies a “*joie de vivre*” not found elsewhere. This joy of life may be the result of truly knowing and understanding the preciousness of life. Perhaps the ever-present reminders of heroes and victories, losses and casualties, carry with them an appreciation for the good things in life—good friends, dear family, and the pleasures of simple living.

Next stop... Paris, the capital city of France! Paris is the most iconic and most visited city in all of France, Europe, and even the world. Are you ready to find out what treasures and stories Paris holds in store for us? Let’s go!



Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

How did the region of Normandy get its name? What part of France is it in? What do you remember about Mont St. Michel? How did people cross from Mont St. Michel to Normandy?

History:

Normandy has experienced countless wars. Describe Joan of Arc's role in the Hundred Years' War. What did you learn about the life of Joan of Arc? Tell us about her humble life, her visions, and her leadership of the French army. Describe the Bayeux Tapestry and the story it tells of the Battle of Hastings. Tell us about the beginning of the end of World War II – D-Day. What does “D-Day” mean? When did it take place? Describe the assault that took place on the coast of Normandy? Why was it such an important battle?

Timeline of France

3300 BC	↑	Monoliths erected in Brittany
51 BC		Brittany becomes part of the Roman Empire
AD 52		The Parisii people found Paris
AD 732		Battle of Tours
AD 800		Charlemagne becomes the Holy Roman Emperor
AD 970		Vikings sail up and down the Dordogne River
AD 1066		Brittany swears loyalty to William the Conqueror
AD 1163		Construction begins on Notre Dame Cathedral
AD 1337		The Hundred Years' War begins
AD 1428		Battle of Orleans
AD 1452		The Hundred Years' War ends
AD 1532		Brittany becomes a province of France
AD 1547		Diane de Poitiers commissions arched bridge to be built over the River Cher
AD 1623		King Louis the 13th begins construction on Versailles
August 8 1786 AD		First ascent of Mont Blanc by Jaques Balmat and Dr. Michel Paccard
AD 1792		French Revolutionaries storm the palace and capture the King
AD 1800		Aristocrats begin to flock to the coast of France
AD 1808		Marie Paradis is the first woman to reach the summit of Mont Blanc
AD 1889		The Eiffel Tower is constructed for the World's Fair
AD 1916		Battle of Verdun in WWI
AD 1924		Chamonix hosts the Winter Olympic Games
June 6 1944 AD		D-Day invasion at Normandy Beach
AD 1955		Mont Blanc cable car built
AD 1958		Fifth French Republic founded by Charles de Gaulle
AD 1997	↓	Construction begins on the Guedelon Castle



France, Pt III

City on the Seine

Today, we are in Paris, the City of Light and capital of France. Paris is the most visited city in the whole world. Why do so many people flock here? Is it because Paris is a beautiful city? Or for its old-world charm, maybe? Those are certainly two of the many draws of this city. There are several reasons why people fly halfway around the world to see and experience Paris, and we are going to learn about many of them today. But one of the main reasons why Paris receives so many visitors is because it is an old, historic city where many world-changing events have occurred.



Plan of Paris, 1550, Olivier Truschet et Germain Hoyau.

We'll start at the very beginning, because that is an excellent place to start. We will drop down into the very heart of Paris, the Île de la Cité [eel-duh-lah-see-tay], the island city where Paris was born. Did you know that Paris has an island in the middle of it? In fact, it has two—the Île de la Cité and the Île Saint-Louis [eel-san-looie] – that are connected to one another by a short bridge. But these islands are not out at sea or off the shores of a great lake. They are located in the middle of the Seine River that flows right through the center of Paris, dividing the city in two.

Long, long ago, shortly after the time of Christ, in the year AD 52, a **Gallic** tribe known as the Parisii fled to this tiny island and began building a refuge for themselves, naturally protected from barbarian



Île de la Cité taken by Daniel Vorndran, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

invaders by the swirling water of the Seine. Over time, this fort grew into a city that spanned both islands and became an important and powerful center during the Middle Ages. If you were standing in the middle of the island city and looked down, you might see a small round marker stone embedded within the cobbled tiles of the courtyard with the words, “Point Zero.” It was from this point that all distances in France were measured during the Middle Ages. In this age of **GPS**, distances are no longer measured by this stone, but it still represents a very significant point in time and space... the birth of the city of Paris.

Point Zero is located in the front courtyard of Notre Dame [noh-trah-dahm], the great gothic cathedral of Paris. You might be familiar with its majestic towers. Construction began in the year 1163 and it took over 200 years to complete the massive structure of bell towers, **naves**, **transepts**, and **flying buttresses**. But that might not be why you would be familiar with it. While the story is fictional, the Notre Dame Cathedral is the setting of the beloved tale, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* written by Victor Hugo, who lived just a few blocks from here during the 1800s.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

Named for Mary, the mother of Jesus, Notre Dame means “Our Lady.” Inside the cavernous cathedral, you will see statues and capstones fashioned in her honor. But outside the church, you see **gargoyles**. At first, you might see just one or two, but then the full realization dawns on you that they are everywhere. Hundreds of gargoyles are hanging off the sides of the stately cathedral. The gargoyles are not merely fanciful decoration; they serve a practical purpose as drain spouts, allowing water to run off the roof of the building during a heavy rainstorm. Also, if you stand outside the cathedral right up close to the outer wall, you can see how high this medieval church rises from the courtyard below. Due to the height of the outer walls of the cathedral, flying buttresses were constructed to keep the walls from collapsing outward. Notre Dame was one of the first buildings to use flying buttresses so that the builders could continue to build ever higher.

Let's stop looking up and start looking down. I'll race you to the top of the bell towers so we can admire the impressive view from above. It's nearly 400 steps to the **pinnacle**, so get ready to have sore legs long before we reach the balcony. It's the top of the hour, so maybe we'll get to hear the bells toll. Breathless and achy, we've arrived at the top of the towers and the bells have begun to ring. The reverber-



The Cathedral of Notre Dame, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

ating sound is heart-pounding, but uplifting. What a breathtaking view of the city of Paris (see photo on page 110) and the tiny people down in the courtyard below! I can just imagine Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame, ringing these great, big bells and swinging from the gargoyles, even if he was only a fictional character. Can you?

See that statue off to the side of the main courtyard? That is Charlemagne, the King of the Franks. He is honored here along with Mary because he is considered the first ruler of France, who eventually became the Holy Roman Emperor of Europe in AD 800. Be sure to snap some photos from way up here because the view from this vantage point is spectacular. In fact, we can point to some of the other sights that we will soon visit—The Louvre, the Tuileries [tweel-ree] Garden, and the Arc de Triomphe [ahrk-duh-tree-ohmf] just beyond. And there's the Eiffel Tower! Everyone who visits Paris must see the Eiffel Tower.

Back down on the ground floor, we notice that the cathedral of Notre Dame has some incredible **stained glass windows**, but if you want to see something truly remarkable in the stained glass department, let's cross the courtyard to Sainte-Chappelle [san-sha-pel]. You won't believe your eyes!

During the Middle Ages, most people couldn't read. Even fewer owned Bibles. This little chapel was built to solve both of those medieval real-world problems. Sainte-Chappelle looks ordinary from the outside, but you can hear the gasps of tourists and worshippers as soon as they step inside the old chapel. Stained glass extends from floor to ceiling on three of the four walls of the building, flooding the chapel with colorful light, each pane telling a story from the Bible. From left to right and top to bottom, the Bible stories are depicted in beautiful detail. Everyone, regardless of wealth, status, or ability, could see and understand that God has loved His people throughout time; that he became a



Sainte-Chappelle, taken by Terri Johnson, all rights reserved.

man, died and rose again to bring life and salvation to His beloved. A remarkable story told in a remarkable way!

As we cross over the bridge, look down below to see another familiar setting from another Disney animated movie. Just below the cathedral of Notre Dame is a paved walkway along the Seine River. It's a favorite place for people to stroll,

dangle their toes in the water, and take photographs. Do you recognize this place? It is the same sidewalk where Remi the rat from *Ratatouille* meets the failing chef Linguini and saves his career. Would you like to take another picture?

See the immense palace there, also along the banks of the Seine? Once the royal palace, it is now a museum. In fact, it is the largest and most visited museum in the world, with over nine million visitors per year.

It is called the Louvre [looov]. The Louvre is an important gallery because it holds some of the most famous paintings and sculptures from the ancient and Renaissance time periods, including the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci.



The Cathedral of Notre Dame, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.



The Pyramid Entrance at the Louvre, public domain photo.

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

Let's go inside. We'll enter through the glittering glass **pyramid** that looks rather out of place centered in the courtyard of the French Renaissance palace—a surprisingly modern entryway to this grand, old château. Below the pyramid atrium is a vast, multi-level maze of galleries, passageways, staircases, and escalators. Although best known for the art it houses, the house itself is a spectacular masterpiece. A section of the museum, which is open to the public, showcases Napoleon III's well-preserved and lavish apartments.

The museum is immense. It is like a city within a city. You could easily spend a full day or maybe even a few days in a place like this. Room after endless room, the great works of art from master painters and sculptors are displayed for the world to see. I am especially anxious to see the *Mona Lisa*. I would like to gaze upon the masterpiece to find out why this particular painting has become the most famous of them all.



Mona Lisa by Michelangelo, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved



Mona Lisa behind a glass box in the Louvre, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

However, standing and admiring the *Mona Lisa* will not be an option today. Not only is she the most famous painting in the world, the *Mona Lisa* is also the most photographed. Crowds of other curious visitors press towards the glass box that shields the small painting—leaning, pushing, and stretching to get a prized photo of the mysterious lady to show their friends back home. Linger over da Vinci's masterpiece is simply not possible.

The Louvre is not the only museum in Paris. This city has more museums packed into its city center than any other—173 to be exact. Instead of the City of Light, Paris' nickname could easily be the City of Museums. We could take a stroll along the length of Claude Monet's *Waterlilies* in the Orangerie or gaze up-close at Rembrandt's *Marais* in the Orsay.

But it's a glorious sunny day, so let's take a stroll through the real Marais district and then through the Tuileries Garden just outside the Louvre. Assembling a picnic lunch is easy here in Paris. We'll visit the boulangerie [boo-lawn-zhree] (the bakery) to buy a baguette, the fromagerie [fro-mah-zhree] (the cheese shop) to choose a cheese we hope we'll like, the charcuterie [shar-coo-tay-ree] (the meat shop) for some sliced meats, and the corner market for a couple of golden pears.

Green wrought-iron chairs circle the pond and fountain where ducks enjoy the leftover sandwich crusts tossed aside by picnickers. The parks of Paris are urban backyards for its residents. Families

spread blankets on the lawn; children run and squeal; couples stroll along hand-in-hand. While we do not know these people personally or even speak their language, we feel welcome and at home here. As the sun begins to descend toward the horizon, the sights of Paris beckon us onward. Beyond the Tuileries and the grand Champs Elysees [shan-zah-lee-zay] avenue lies the Arc de Triomphe, a massive **neoclassical** arch built by Napoleon in honor of the brave men and women who gave their lives for France during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. Beneath its vault lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Its eternal flame burns in memory of the soldiers who were never identified during World War I and World War II.

We can hike to the top of the Arc if our legs aren't too sore from our last climb. There aren't as many steps this time—only 284 to the viewing deck above! We've got another great view of the city, but what makes this one so impressive is its symmetry. Twelve grand avenues radiate out from the Arc de Triomphe, like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. Cars are driving in from all directions and circling around us at the base of the arch 50 meters (164 feet) below.

This monument is so large that a plane once flew through its archway as a glorious display of French national pride. The arch has been the location of many great beginnings and memorable endings. Troops have been sent forth from here; victory parades celebrated; the bodies of French heroes have



The Arc de Triomphe, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

been carried under this stone passage on their way to their final resting places, most notably the bodies of Napoleon and Victor Hugo (author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*).

What an ideal place to appreciate the brilliant sunset! As the sun gleams bright on the horizon and casts an orange glow on the Eiffel Tower to the west (see photo on the cover), we say goodnight to Paris, all the while looking forward to spending more time with her tomorrow as we ride to the highest point in the city and see the greatest display of wealth on the planet.

Bonsoir, Paris! See you in the morning!

Tell me what you remember about...

Geography:

Which river flows through the center of Paris, dividing the city in two? What is special about the islands located in the middle of this river in the heart of the city?

Landmarks:

Tell me what you remember about the great gothic cathedral of Paris, Notre Dame. What does Notre Dame mean and who was it named after? Where would you find gargoyles and what is their purpose?

Do you remember what is special about Saint Chappelle? What a surprise! How did this help people during the Middle Ages who could not read the Bible?

What is the Louvre? Leonardo da Vinci painted one of the most famous paintings in the world. What is the name of this masterpiece? Are you familiar with any other pieces of his artwork?



The steps in the Arc de Triomphe, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

What is the name of the massive arch in Paris that was built by Napoleon? Tell me three things that you remember about this arch.

We explored many historic sites in Paris. Which one would you like to visit if you were in Paris? Describe what you would do and see there.

Opulence and Revolution

Today, we continue our tour of Paris, the City of Light. Later this evening, we will see some of those sparkling, glittery lights that make this city shine. But first, I would like to take you on a journey through places that tell the story of a major turning-point in France's history, when she transitioned from a monarchy to a republic through incredible turmoil, blood, sacrifice, and tears.

We'll start at a **gilded** palace about twenty minutes outside of town. Come, step into this bike rental shop before we head for the train station. We are renting bikes for this trip. We can carry our bicycles right onto the train with us now, and then enjoy a bike tour around the Versailles gardens later.

When the royal château was built, the town of Versailles was a small, rural village. Today, however, it is a wealthy suburb of Paris, about twenty kilometers southwest of the city center. King Louis XIII of France began building the château in 1623 to serve as a hunting lodge for the royal family. Later, his son King Louis XIV greatly expanded the country château into a royal palace, unmatched in size, wealth, and grandeur by any other palace in Europe. Louis XIV, known as the Sun King, ruled France longer than any other monarch. He eventually moved out to Versailles, making the palace his primary residence. The Palace of Versailles became the envy of all the surrounding kingdoms and the center



"To all the glories of France," the Palace of Versailles, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

of political power in France for more than a hundred years, until the system of absolute monarchy crumbled to the ground.

The palace is enormous in size and opulent in splendor. On the side that faces the town, the imposing structure proclaims, “A toutes les gloires de la France.” [ah-too-lay-gl-wahr-de-lah-franse] To all the glories of France. Indeed, such magnificence and splendor boast of an era in France when the royal family flaunted their extreme wealth and position in society.

Gold trims the outside of the palace and is found in abundance within. As we walk through the royal apartments, the hall of mirrors, and the lavish staterooms with intricately painted ceilings and portraits of the Sun King and his relations, we cannot help but marvel at the expense and labor that was required to build this masterpiece of a palace. But for all the opulence within the castle walls, the purest beauty can be found outside in the extensive gardens that spread out for miles on the far side of the château.



Versailles Palace, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

As it says in Matthew 6:28, “Observe how the lilies of the field grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet not even Solomon (the richest king in the world), in all his glory, clothed himself as one of these.” Man-made splendors can never compare to the exquisite beauty found in nature.

It’s time to hop on our bikes. The gardens extend for miles and there is still more to see here at the Palace of Versailles. Within the expansive “backyard” of the main palace, there are several cafés, a lake with paddle boats, mazes created from sheared hedges, additional smaller palaces, and even a medieval **hamlet**. Let’s explore...

Not every king and queen of France enjoyed their royal life all the time. Sometimes the pressures of being a monarch and making decisions became too overwhelming. Versailles was no longer an escape from the political pressures of Paris, as politics had a way of following the king wherever he went. So smaller palaces were built on the grounds where a king or a queen could go to retreat. In fact, an en-

tire village was built as a queen's retreat. But I get ahead of myself. Let me tell you the story of a little girl...

Once there lived a little girl, a princess in fact, who grew up in a great big palace, the youngest daughter of the most powerful couple in Europe—the Habsburgs of Austria. She was the fifteenth child of Francis I, the Holy Roman Emperor and Empress Maria Theresa. The girl's name was Marie Antonia. Even though she was a princess, she was an ordinary little girl who enjoyed playing with dolls, playing dress-up, and playing the piano.

When she was young, she secretly engaged herself to marry her piano tutor, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. But this engagement was not to be. Marie's parents were greedy for more power and influence, but were not fond of warfare. They expanded their kingdom by carefully arranging the marriages of their children, thereby forming alliances and increasing their influence throughout the rest of Europe.



Marie, age 12, portrait by Martin van Meytens

They set their eyes on France and offered their youngest daughter, Marie, as a bride to the Dauphin, Louis XVI, the prince and heir to the French throne. With the marriage arranged, Marie became the Dauphine, the future Queen of France, by the time she turned fifteen. She met her husband a month after their marriage **by proxy** and together they moved into the Palace of Versailles. Four years later, Marie Antoinette was officially crowned queen when her husband's grandfather passed away.



Louis XVI of France, portrait by Joseph Duplessis

While Marie enjoyed the benefits of being a queen, such as the exquisite dresses and the extravagant parties, some aspects of her royal life were less desirable, such as the constant invasion into her privacy.

As queen, she helped make some important decisions, like the decision for France to aid the American colonies in their fight for independence from Britain. Ironically, this decision would ultimately bring about the French Revolution, which in turn, eventually led to her tragic death.

When Marie Antoinette became overwhelmed by politics, she would retreat to the Petit Trianon [pe-tee-tree-ah-non] Palace tucked away in the gardens of Versailles, which her husband gave to her as a wedding gift. She created this mini-palace to be her dream home. But even there, she could not truly get away from the pressures of royal life.

So she built a hamlet—a small rural village—not far from her home, but hidden away deeper within the expansive grounds of Versailles. There, she commissioned the construction of a man-made lake, surrounded by rustic vineyards and vegetable gardens, quaint thatched roof cottages and sturdy shingled barns. The charming village scene was complete with farm animals and servants to care for them and tend to the vineyards.

The hamlet served as the queen’s retreat from her royal life. She would leave her magnificent palaces behind, don her simple **muslin** dress, and pretend to blend into the rural village scene.



Marie Antoinette's Hamlet, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

As the years went on, Marie Antoinette became the mother of four precious children and for the most part, life was good, until the idea of “revolution” ignited in France. After the colonists defeated the British in North America, the people of France became less and less enraptured with their own monarchs and wanted freedom from their rule.

Because Marie had been a spoiled child and lived all her life without physical hardship, the poor and hard-working commoners in France began to despise her. They complained that she spent too much money on herself and not enough for the common good of France.

As the idea of “revolution” continued to burn in France, the royal family was forced to move back to Paris and leave the Palace of Versailles behind. They took up residence in the Tuileries Palace (now the Louvre Museum) and lived virtually under house arrest. As French citizens became increasingly upset over being ruled by a king, tensions grew, making life exponentially less comfortable for the royal family.

Eventually, the people came to believe that if they removed their king from the throne, they would be left with a republic where the common people of France could rule themselves. In June of the year 1792, a terrifying mob broke into the palace, captured the king and threatened the queen and their children. Six months later, King Louis XVI was tried by the radical revolutionaries and by popular vote, was condemned to death by **guillotine**.

Shortly after, the queen was taken from the palace to the Conciergerie building, just across the square from the Notre Dame Cathedral, and held as a prisoner there. Nine months later, she too was hauled away in the back of a cart, dressed in the white gown of a criminal, to the Place de la Révolution and executed by guillotine.

The queen, who supported a revolution in the thirteen colonies, far across the sea, became the casualty of another revolution, one that sprang up in her own adopted homeland. Some people believe she was responsible for starting the French Revolution, but most historians believe that she was simply the victim of her family’s ambitions and the untimely political upheaval in France. Politics aside, Marie Antoinette was a devoted mother and a courageous woman to the end.



Marie with her children, portrait by Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller, 1785



Traveling from Versailles to the Tuileries Palaces to the Concierge to the Place de la Révolution, following the footsteps of Marie Antoinette, we have viewed just one snapshot from the French Revolution photo album. But before we conclude the day, we need to see one more important sight. We're off to the most visited landmark in Paris—the Eiffel Tower. Let's find out why the Eiffel Tower is the most photographed monument in the world.

This monumental tower did not exist in 1789, during the time of the revolution, but was built in 1889 to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the French Revolution and the birth of the French Republic. Soaring 320 meters—over 1,000 feet—from the ground, you can see the Eiffel Tower from miles away. It's easy to get to and even easier to find. If we hop on the metro (Paris' rapid transit train), we'll be there before you know it.



The Eiffel Tower, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

Gustave Eiffel, the same man who designed the Statue of Liberty in New York, built the Eiffel Tower, the tallest structure in the world at the time it was built. It was constructed as a colossal gateway into the **World's Fair**, which Paris hosted on the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. Originally, the tower was intended to be a temporary structure, which would be removed after the fair. However, the 10,000-ton tower grew on the residents of Paris, who once thought it ugly. Over time, they began to embrace it as the iconic symbol of their city.

As we walk underneath its base, we can see just how massive this structure is. Made of 18,000 pieces of wrought iron, the area under the four bases covers 100 square meters (328 feet). You could fit a couple of football fields under the tower. Each of the four bases, or feet, of the tower is a ticket station with a two-story elevator transporting visitors to the first and second levels of the tower. We can climb to either of these



Pain au Chocolat, taken by Cyclonebill, public domain image, CC BY-SA 2.0.

levels—400 steps to the first level, then another 400 to the second—but if we want to get to the tip-top, the third level viewing platform, we’ll need to take the elevator, because no one is allowed to climb all 1,710 steps to the top of the needle.

The best way to enjoy the Eiffel Tower is from the top down. Our first elevator ride takes us past Level 1 and up to Level 2. Here we must get off and change to a different elevator that ascends to the very top. Let’s hope that the clouds have blown away from the tower before we get there, because the tip often extends into the clouds.

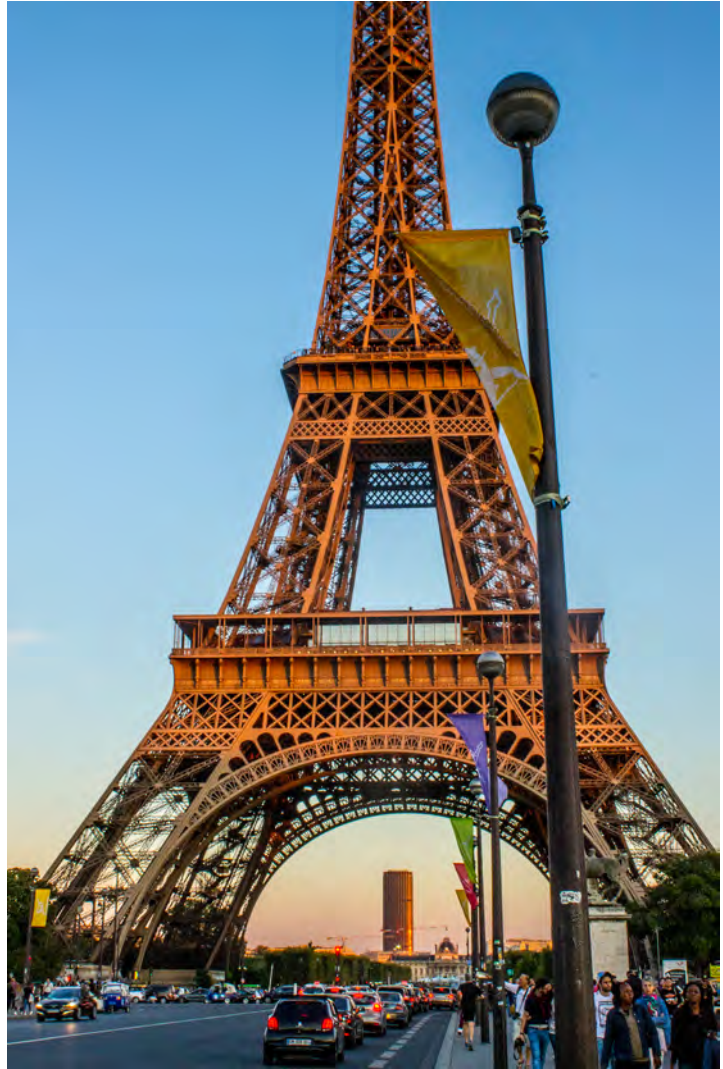
As it turns out, it is brilliant up here. The air is crystal clear and we can see for 40 miles (or 65 kilometers) in all directions. There is the Arc de Triomphe and beyond it the Sacré-Coeur [sac-rah-curr]. And there! You can see Notre Dame Cathedral. Was it just yesterday that we were at the top of its towers, looking this direction at the Eiffel Tower? On a glorious day like today, we could stay for hours enjoying the view, but there is more to see down below, so let’s get back on the elevator.

Level Two is very crowded because not everyone wants to go to the top. There is a restaurant on this level and a gift shop. The view from here is also remarkable. The sights below are more easily recognizable because we are closer to the ground. Look! There is our hotel and our favorite patisserie [pat-is-er-ee] (pastry shop) with the delicious pain au chocolat [pan-oh-shah-koh-lah] (chocolate-filled croissant).

Finally, we can climb down the stairs to Level One, which also has a restaurant, restrooms, and café. Let's order a hot drink, pull up a couple of chairs at an outdoor bistro table and people-watch. There is a glass floor on this level, so we can step out and look down at the people waiting in line below. They are still a long way down even from the first level. It's amusing to watch sightseers stand on the glass floor and take photos of their feet. During the cold winter of 2004, this level was turned into an ice skating rink. Now that sounds like fun!

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

The sun is setting, spilling its colors across the sky like the wide strokes of a painter's brush; soon it will slip below the horizon. During the day, the tower is most stunning at dusk. Once we get back on the ground, we can watch the tower glow pink in the light of the setting sun. Photographers arrive in droves trying to capture that iconic photo. If we wait until it gets dark, we can watch as the tower lights up with hundreds of glittering lights. It's a sight to see! But let's cross the river and get at least a half a mile away so that we can capture the full tower in our camera's lens, because our friends and family will certainly want to see this shot!



The Eiffel Tower, taken by Terri Johnson, all rights reserved.

The Eiffel Tower is glorious for a man-made hunk of steel, isn't it? What a wonderful way to conclude our visit to Paris, the City of Light.

Tell me what you remember about...

Versailles:

What do you think about the Palace of Versailles? Can you draw me a picture of the palace with words? Do you think that King Louis XIII of France had any idea what his hunting lodge would one day become? Who lived in this palace?

French Revolution:

What events occurred that changed the political ruling structure of France?

Why do you think that Marie Antoinette wanted to escape her royal life and live like a peasant? Tell me what you remember about her life.

Eiffel Tower:

Would you like to go all the way to the top of the Eiffel Tower? Why was the Eiffel Tower originally built?

What fact surprised you most about the Tower and why?



Paris skyline, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.



France, Pt IV

Valley of the Châteaux

When I was a child, I was fascinated with medieval castles, valiant knights, and heroic princesses. That hasn't changed very much. Stories about princes and princesses set in drafty old castles from a time long past; or about a knight on a fantastic quest to save his kingdom and win the hand of his lady still captivate me. The Middle Ages—otherwise known as the Medieval time period—was an age of feudalism, a social system that has faded into the distant past. If we understand feudalism, we will understand the medieval life.



The medieval fortress of Castlenaud in Dordogne, France, Adobe Stock Photos, licensed for publication.



This photo of Chambord was taken by Apple.White2010, public domain image under license CC BY 2.0.

Feudalism was a system of obligations that bound noblemen, such as a duke, count, or lord, to their subjects. The king owned all the land in his kingdom, but he gave portions of it to his nobles in exchange for their loyalty and military service. In other words, if the kingdom went to war, these nobles and their knights were obligated to fight for their king. On the land granted to him, the noble lord would build a large castle for his family and servants, and grant portions of the remaining land surrounding his castle to the peasants (also known as the common folk or serfs). In return for use of the land, the peasants were obligated to give the noble household a portion of the crops that they grew on the land. The nobleman and his family would protect the peasants on his tract of land by providing a safe place of refuge inside the castle walls should their community be attacked by Vikings, pirates, or neighbors.

Feudalism worked because everyone was obligated to fulfill their assigned duties, which contributed to the survival of all the social classes. Then a powdery substance called gunpowder was invented that began to tear at the very fabric of this tightly woven society.

After this world-changing invention hundreds of years ago, kings and nobles stopped building defensive castles because the mighty structures were no longer adequate shelters from intruders. Once

gunpowder was discovered and used as an explosive, even thick castle walls could no longer withstand the attack of an enemy. Cannons could be fired to rip apart the walls and gates of a once mighty fortress within hours. By the 15th century, it no longer made sense to build castles with thick walls, strong gates, and deep **moats**. And once castles could no longer provide protection, the whole feudal system began to fall apart. Serfs no longer felt obligated to stay and grow crops for their masters. Heavy cannons replaced agile knights. Nobles abandoned their drafty old castles for fine homes in the city.

Castles have stood the test of time and continue to boast of an era long past when the rich and the poor worked together to create a harmonious community that supported and protected one another. Many historic castles remain intact in Europe, Ireland, Japan, and the Middle East, and are open to the public for tours. If you live in North America, you may have never seen a true medieval castle. The feudal system had collapsed long before the colonists formed a new nation that did not require building castles.

Even though defensive castles were no longer built past the 15th century, kings and nobles continued to build decorative castles and palaces as summer homes and vacation getaways. France has some of the finest castles—called “châteaux” [sha-toh] in French—on the planet. Like a string of pearls, elegant castles dot the Loire River, which runs southwest of Paris and nearly divides France in two. Just beyond Versailles (which is technically a palace and not a castle) over an hour outside of town, we arrive at the lovely Loire [lwahr] River Valley where we’ll find several of the most graceful castles in Europe. While a few have fallen into disrepair and others were destroyed during the French Revolution by angry revolutionaries, most still stand in pristine condition.

In France, all trains lead to Paris, which means that we can travel to virtually anywhere in the country from the capital city. Let’s hop on the train leaving the station for the Loire Valley and get off at the first Loire township of Blois [blwah]. The bus station is at the base of the imposing castle squarely positioned in the center of town. We’ll take the special tour bus that drives the length of the châteaux-studded Loire Valley and visit several of the castles that are open to the public.

Our first stop is Chambord [shahm-boor], the largest château in the valley. Far more immense than the average Loire castle, Chambord boasts 440 rooms with 365 fireplaces. That’s one for every day of the year! This grand château is surrounded by Europe’s largest enclosed forest and **game preserve**, home to hundreds of wild deer and boar. François I of France built this fortress for a hunting lodge for himself and his noble companions.

King François I ruled for 32 years during the age of absolute monarchs. He used this colossal hunting lodge as one way to display his wealth and power. It took 1,800 workmen fifteen years to complete his royal retreat, which he only visited eight times during his rule. It is speculated that the famous Italian



Aerial view of Chambord by Elementerre, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

Renaissance artist and architect, Leonardo da Vinci, drew the designs for the palace, as he was a close personal friend and the next-door neighbor to the king.

The castle is built in the shape of a cross with a **double-helix** stairway in the center that ascends all three floors, up to a rooftop terrace. A **cupola** tower juts even further into the sky from the terrace and crowns the palace with a decorative **fleur-de-lis**, the symbol of the French monarchy.

As we walk through the lavish apartments of various French kings and queens, including Louis XIV who built Versailles, we notice that everything inside was designed to be easily dismantled and moved with the royal **entourage**. Because French kings moved from palace to palace frequently, the entire court—people, furniture, and personal possessions—had to be mobile. A royal château might sit cold and empty for years; then suddenly spring to life when the king came to visit.

The French word for furniture is “mobilier” [moh-bee-lee-ay], which literally means “mobile.” Imagine the scene... Before the arrival of the royal family, servants would set up everything to ensure their

stay was comfortable. They would hang tapestries, assemble beds, unpack heavy trunks, and set up tables and chairs. Everything had to be perfect before the lord and his family arrived.

Look at the time! Our bus leaves in fifteen minutes, so we better hurry or we might miss it. Our next stop is the château of Chenonceau [shuh-non-soh], perhaps the most elegant of all the Loire châteaux. Chenonceau is nicknamed “château of the ladies” as it was the favorite home of many powerful noblewomen and queens of France. As each regal lady moved in and made the château her home, a new addition to the castle or gardens was built. Diane de Poitiers, who lived here in 1547, commissioned an arched bridge to span the River Cher. Queen Catherine de Medici later converted the bridge into a covered ballroom.

The gardens are spectacular here, rivaling those of Versailles and Villandry, a château to the south famed for its gardens. Every day, large bouquets of fresh flowers are brought into the castle from the garden to add cheer and fragrance. Watch your head as you duck into some of the rooms to see the big fireplaces, raised platform beds and gorgeous tapestries. Door mantels were built much lower during the 16th century! (Doorway openings were smaller during the Middle Ages to maximize heat efficiency, not because people were shorter.) While we are here, let’s look around the huge kitchen upstairs and the big stables outside, which now feature some stylish early model automobiles.



The Château of Chenonceau, taken by Terri Johnson, all rights reserved.

What an elegant and lavish estate this is! The ladies of the château certainly made some lovely home improvement decisions while their kings or noblemen were away on matters of war or business.

Our next stop is the quaint town of Amboise [ahm-bwahz] situated alongside the Loire River. There is a castle here too, but that's not why we've come. We are here to see the final home of the most famous Italian Renaissance man —Leonardo da Vinci. But first, let me tell you a little history about this peaceful river that flows serenely by the castle and town.

The Loire River is of great importance to the French people and has long marked the boundary between southern and northern France. Over a thousand years ago, when the Moors invaded Europe and marched up through Spain to conquer France, this was as far north as they advanced. They were blocked at the Battle of Tours in AD 732. It's also where the English were stopped during the Hundred Years' War, when the English controlled everything to the north and the French controlled the land on the southern side. Interestingly, the Nazi Germans were blocked at this river during their advance into France during World War II.

So, French royalty maintained a strong connection with the Loire and the land surrounding it, not only for its beauty but also for its history. For those reasons, and because of its close proximity to



Leonardo da Vinci's bedchamber taken by Leonard de Serre, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

Paris, kings kept building castles for themselves here. François I, who built the Chambord hunting lodge, lived here in the Amboise castle along the mighty Loire for many years. François considered himself a progressive man and loved everything about the Renaissance movement in Italy. He wanted to bring the Renaissance to France, so he wooed Italy's most prominent citizen to take up residence next door to his castle in Amboise. With enthusiasm, Leonardo da Vinci accepted François' invitation.



Clos Luce taken by Leonard de Serre, under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

The 22-year-old king arranged for Clos-Lucê [kloh-loo-say], a small mansion just up the street, to become the next residence for the ultimate Renaissance artist. At 64 years of age, da Vinci moved in and set up shop. He spent his final three years here: painting, inventing, and designing. The aging artist and the young king became good friends. There is a painting by da Vinci inside the mansion of Clos-Lucê that shows the artist on his deathbed, with the young king at his side, comforting him before his departure from this world.

The mansion of Clos-Lucê recreates the everyday life that Leonardo enjoyed while he lived here. There is the great hall where he entertained his important guests; his comfortable bedchamber where he entertained his inventive ideas; and his fine kitchen, where he entertained himself with fine cuisine provided by the king's chef. And all throughout his handsome home, we find display models of da Vinci's remarkable inventions, rebuilt according to his detailed notes.

The grounds have been developed into an interactive park, featuring life-size models of da Vinci's clever contraptions, complete with gear systems, water pumps, paddleboats, and spinning helicopter blades. Parents relax on benches while kids climb, ride, and spin the machines that Leonardo dreamt about when he couldn't sleep at night: the ultimate playground with twenty interactive apparatuses to explore.

Let's walk back toward the castle and wander along the street that runs beside its outer wall. I noticed that there are several restaurants that were closed during the day, but spring to life around 7 pm. Let's duck into one of them and enjoy a nice meal before turning in for the night. This place looks fancy, but the prices are reasonable. Take a look at the menu. What will you have?

Menu

Included: soup or house salad, dessert, regular hot tea or coffee, or
Onion Soup \$3,95 EXTRA • Vichyssoise \$3,95 EXTRA • Escargots de Bourgogne \$4,95 EXTRA
*Pate Maison \$4,95 EXTRA • Caesar Salad \$3,95 EXTRA • Complete Dinners *A la carte*

FILET OF SOLE MEUNIÈRE

*Sautéed with butter and lemon, rice, vegetables \$26,95 \$21,95**

SALMON AU BEURRE BLANC

*With lemon and white wine Sauce, rice, vegetables \$26,95 \$21,95**

FROG LEGS PROVENCALE

*Sautéed with garlic and parsley, rice, vegetables \$29,95 \$24,95**

POULET ROTI FRITES

*Roasted Chicken, French Fries \$22,95 \$17,95**

CHICKEN BREAST FRANCAIS

*Sautéed with lemon sauce, served with rice, vegetables \$24,95 \$19,95**

CALVES LIVER LYONNAISE

*Thin slices of liver, sautéed onions, mashed potatoes vegetable \$26,95 \$21,95**

ROAST DUCKLING À L'ORANGE

*Half Duckling, orange sauce, mashed potatoes, vegetables \$31,95 \$26,95**

FILET MIGNON AU POIVRE ROZ

*Brandy, peppercorn sauce, mashed potatoes, vegetables \$34,95 \$29,95**

RACK OF LAMB PROVENCALE

*Oven Roasted, served with herbs juice, mashed potatoes \$34,95 \$29,95**

ORGANIC VEGETABLES "COCOTTE"

*With sautéed Shrimps or Tofu \$24,95 \$19,95**

CHICKEN BREAST MASCOTTE "COCOTTE"

*Sautéed mushroom, artichokes, cream sauce, boiled potatoes \$24,95 \$19,95**

BEEF BOURGUIGNON "COCOTTE"

*Beef stew cooked in a red wine, boiled potatoes, vegetables \$25,95 \$20,95**

DRINKS

Cider

It's time to call it a night. At the end of the street, there is a quaint little half-timbered inn, its soft golden light spilling from the windows onto the path. The quiet murmur of voices floating on the cool evening breeze reach our ears as we approach. I'm ready to rest after our busy day. How about you? While there are many other castles in this region that we could explore if we had more time, we have seen some exceptional examples of Loire Valley châteaux.

Tomorrow, we'll take a whirlwind tour of Burgundy and the Alsace regions of France. Afterwards, we'll circle back almost to where we started in southern France; only we'll stop short when we get to the Alps, the gateway to Switzerland and the mountain countries beyond. Good night! Bonne Nuit!

Tell me what you remember about...

Feudalism and Castle Life:

Feudalism worked because everyone, from the king to the peasant, was obligated to fulfill his or her assigned duties. Describe the main responsibilities of each class in the feudal system. Would you have liked living in this social system? Why or why not? What caused the downfall of feudalism and how?

What is a château and how were they different from defensive castles? Where in France can many of these châteaux be found?

Why were many things inside a castle designed to be easily moved? Do you remember the French word for furniture? What is the fleur-de-lis?

Chenonceau and Clos-Lucé:

The Château of Chenonceau, or “château of the ladies,” was changed or added on to as each new regal lady took residence there. Tell me about some of these changes. If you could design your dream château, what would it look like?

Which famous Italian Renaissance artist moved into a mansion up the road from King Francois I? How many years did he live there?



A Taste of Medieval Life

We are heading east through central France. Turning off the main highway, we'll drive to our first and perhaps most exciting destination of the day— Guédelon [gay-de-lohn] Castle. Now before you say that you've seen enough castles, there is something that I need to tell you. This castle is a work in progress, meaning it's not done yet!

That's right. This castle is being built now, in the modern 21st century. The workers are not using modern-day tools or machines to build it. Why? Because in the heart of France, in the region of northern Burgundy, an extraordinary **archeological** experiment is being conducted on a very grand scale. A team of fifty master builders are constructing a 13th century castle using only the medieval techniques and materials that would have been available to them had they lived during that time.

Construction began in 1997, but the medieval castle will not be completed until the 2020's. This quarter of a century project employs over fifty workers, several horses (no trucks or tractors allowed!), and many volunteers. The site selected for the castle is near an abundance of natural resources necessary for the project: an abandoned stone **quarry**, a large forest, and a natural pond. All materials for the job, including the wood and stone, must be obtained locally. Nothing is shipped in or delivered by FedEx.

The workers are happy to give us a guided tour. About 300,000 students and tourists visit the construction site each year just to look around and appreciate this massive undertaking. However, we may volunteer to help! There is so much work that needs to be done, but every little bit of effort gets this castle a little closer to completion. Here are some of the projects we can work on:

- * Forming terracotta tiles
- * Twisting hemp rope
- * Mixing daub for wattle and daub
- * Baking bread in the brick oven for the work crew



Guédelon Castle taken by Lain G, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

Perhaps you have never heard of wattle and daub? This is an old medieval technique for making durable, insulated walls. First a woven lattice of wooden strips is formed for the structure of the wall, which is the wattle, and then it is “daubed” with a sticky material made from a combination of wet soil, clay, sand, animal dung, and straw. The daub dries hard to insulate and protect the building from the weather outside.

Let’s don our medieval costumes and get to work. Today, the work crew needs help with tile production, so we’ll be forming the tiles from scratch. Water is mixed with the clay-like soil from the area to make the clay; a stiff dough consistency is needed. We’ll press this clay into the mold to form tiles, which will then be baked in the warm French sunshine to become a hard stone-like tile ready to be placed on the roof of the great hall.

Watch here as some women show us how to form these tiles perfectly:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

Wonderful! It is time for a break. Bakers, along with their volunteers, push carts mounded with freshly baked **baguette** loaves through the construction site. Each of the workers grabs a baguette and sits upon the stone walls to enjoy some rest, nourishment, and good conversation.

We've only been here for a few hours, but some volunteers come and work for a week, a month, a summer, or even a whole year. If you would like to learn about one trio's six-month adventure volunteering at Guédelon Castle, you may want to watch the documentary series called, "Secrets of the Castle." Here is a link to the first episode:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

Our visit to the castle project is quickly coming to a close. We have more to see of Burgundy, as we travel across central France to the Alsace, the region of the country that borders Germany.

Burgundy is world-renowned for its vineyards and its rich red wines. But what makes Burgundy so unique is that it is crisscrossed by man-made **canals**, dug out and outfitted with a series of **locks** so that goods could be transported by boat across the width of France, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Nowadays, products are more quickly shipped via truck, train, or plane, so the canals are lined instead with pleasure boats loaded with tourists who have come to enjoy the French landscape, drink its wine, and savor its flavorful food.

Burgundy is also known for its delectable cuisine—the quintessentially French foods, such as escargot [ess-car-goh] (stuffed snails) and coq au vin [koh-koh-van] (chicken stewed in wine). Would you like to try either one of these dishes? Yes, please, I'll try the chicken! If you are ever in the mood to



A canal in Burgundy taken by Oliver Barge, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

spend some time in the kitchen, you might like to try your hand at coq au vin and impress your family at dinnertime. I hear that Julia Child's recipe is mouth-watering. Her recipe can be found at this link:

<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/media-files-acg4-france-ch5-8/>

North of Burgundy is the region of Lorraine and the town of Verdun. Verdun is close to the hearts of the French people. Many battles have been waged on this thin stretch of land, situated along the northern border of France. However, only one battle is conjured up in the minds of the French when you whisper, "the Battle of Verdun"—the campaign that they won after 300 long days of struggle.

The most recent Battle of Verdun took place one hundred years ago, beginning in February of 1916. It was one of the bloodiest battles of World War I. The Germans thought that they would "bleed the French white" in no time, but they didn't fully understand how precious the land of Verdun was to the French people or how stubbornly they would fight to protect their beloved homeland.



Trench warfare, public domain image under license CC BY-SA 3.0.

After nearly a year of **trench warfare**, the Germans began losing ground as their efforts were redirected toward the British who had earlier that summer launched an attack against the Germans further to the west. The British offensive was named the Battle of the Somme. The Battle of Verdun concluded just before Christmas on December 18th, but because it lasted so long—almost ten months—it was also one of the costliest battles of the war for both sides.

Back on the road and over a small mountain range, we come to the

region known as the Alsace. This region resides in France, but seems more German in many ways. Historically, the Germans thought that the mountains formed the logical border between their two countries, but the French believed that the Rhine River made a more natural border. The Alsace is the area smack dab between the two and it has been fought over by France and Germany for centuries. This crossroads between the two countries has given the Alsace a unique hybrid culture. In the Alsace, you will find a rich blending of these two great nations: French and German, Catholic and Protestant, escargot and sauerkraut.



Half-timbered shops in Colmar, France, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

In the Alsace, the signs are bilingual and so are the names. Many German families gave their children French first names so as to disassociate from Germany after World War II. This blending of cultures can also be found in the very fabric of its citizens' personalities. People here have a particular "joie de vivre" attitude, which is very French, but mixed with Germanic discipline.

While most of the cobbled towns in this region are incredibly charming, Colmar is certainly one of the cutest towns in France. With its quaint half-timbered buildings painted in cheery pastel colors, it looks like a town pulled from the pages of a fairy tale. Colmar's charms are rooted in a wealthy medieval past. Fifteenth century Colmar was one of ten cities that joined together to form the Decapolis, which was a league of trading cities, something like a modern worker's union. This brought wealth to the commoners who learned solid trades and became successful business owners.

Trading leagues were forming during the late Middle Ages in reaction to the problems that came with feudalism: tiny kingdoms acting as individual communities that didn't cooperate well with their neighbors. No system of uniform **currency** (money) yet existed. Every town or community had a different set of weights and measures. Tolls and taxes were extracted from tradesmen every time they entered a new realm to barter and trade their goods. All of these things were good for the nobility—the wealthy medieval landlords—but they made life a chaotic nightmare for the craftsmen and mer-



Baeckeoffe, public domain image by Loveless, license CC BY-SA 3.0.

chants. That is why trading leagues like the Decapolis were formed—to remove barriers to free trade.

Have you ever wondered why houses like this one hang out over the street? You could call this a medieval life hack. Back in medieval times, houses were taxed by the square footage that it occupied, measured at street level. So builders and homeowners discovered that they could build both up and out without further taxation.

This crooked, top-heavy building has a bakery at street level. The baker would have lived upstairs. Let's step inside to see a medieval brick oven. Even though they are hundreds of years old, these ovens are still used to bake traditional French breads and Baeckeoffe. Baeckeoffe is a traditional Alsatian casse-rolle that gets its name from where it was cooked – in the “baker’s oven.” During medieval times, an Alsatian homemaker would collect her family’s leftovers of **mutton**, pork, potatoes, onions, and leeks in a covered crockpot throughout the week. She would pour white wine over the food scraps. On Sunday, she would take the ceramic pot with her as she left for church. When she passed by the bakery, she would stop in and place her pot in one of the large stone ovens, still warm from baking bread that morning. The baker would seal the lid to the pot with a rope of bread dough to ensure the moisture would not escape. After the long Sunday morning service, the meat would be perfectly stewed and ready for her family’s midday meal.

Would you like to try some? Trust me, it tastes better than it sounds!

Tell me what you remember about...

Guédelon Castle:

What is unique about Guédelon Castle? Why is the location of this castle so important? What is waddle and daub? I think it would be amazing to be part of the team working on this project! What part of the construction would you like to help with?

Verdun:

Why is Verdun so important to the French?

The Alsace:

Alsace is the area just between France and Germany. The two countries wanted to use different natural borders for the region. What were they? What is different about most of the signs in Alsace? What led to such a blending of cultures in this region?

What is the Decapolis and why was it formed?



The Majestic French Alps

And with that scrumptious meal digesting in our bellies, we must be off again to our last, but certainly not least, destination in France: the French Alps! There is no quick way to get there from here. We can travel around the western tip of Switzerland or we can go through it. I vote we go through it. While we do not have time to stop and explore the sites now (but we will soon!), we can enjoy the charming western Swiss countryside with its deep blue lakes, green rolling hills, and happy cheese-making cows from our train window.

Our **Alpine** train chugs toward the quiet little station of Chamonix [shah-moh-nee]. We can see that something spectacular awaits us before we even get off the train. We press against the train's windows that extend partway into the ceiling; the view of the Alps towering above us is mesmerizing. At each bend in the tracks, the mountains become even more majestic. We cannot look away. The train



The train on its way to Chamonix, taken by Terri Johnson, all rights reserved.

is filled mostly with teenaged students, chatting and laughing, on their way home from school. Accustomed to the view, they pull cameras from their backpacks strewn on the floor to take pictures of each other. That reminds me; we should take pictures too—but of the Alps!

During the warmer seasons, Chamonix is just a quiet little village tucked away at the bottom of majestic Mont Blanc. It is the highest mountain in Europe outside of the Caucasus Range. In wintertime, when the heavy snows cover Chamonix in a lovely blanket of white, this quiet town springs to life. Home of the first Winter Olympic Games in 1924, Chamonix is a winter sports haven for skiers, ski jumpers, **luggers**, and the like.

But today, the sport of choice is icepick mountain climbing. As we wait at the bottom of the Aiguille du Midi [ay-gwee-doo-mee-dee] ski lift that will whisk us up the face of the mountain, to the highest point in the Alps, we are joined by several mountaineers, bedecked in special climbing boots and warm winter clothing, an assortment of ropes, ratchets, and icepicks dangling from their belts.

The name “Aiguille du Midi” means “needle at midday” or “needle of the south” because we are technically in the south of France. This mountain peak stands due east of Mont Blanc and hosts a cable car transporting visitors up to its tippy-top. The cable car, or téléphérique [tay-lay-fay-reek] as it is called in French, was built in 1955 and still holds the record for the highest vertical ascent cable car in the world. We’ll be traveling nearly 3,000 meters (10,000 feet) from the base to the summit in just a matter of minutes. Hold on tight! It is quite an exhilarating ride! Once at the top, the breathtaking Alps



Aiguille du Midi, public domain image taken by Garrondo, license CC BY-SA 3.0.



Mont Blanc, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

spread out before us like the jagged teeth of a crocodile. You truly have to remember to breathe when you see something as awe-inspiring as these majestic Alps.

But we can go higher still! Inside the building carved from the rocky belly of the mountain, there is an elevator that will take us to the top of the needle. Standing on the 360-degree viewing platform, we can truly appreciate and photograph what are perhaps the most beautiful mountains in the world. Zip up your coat before we reach the top, because it never gets above freezing up here.

The view is spectacular, but the deck is frozen and slippery, so watch your step! On a clear day like today, we can see many notable landmarks. Ahead, off in the distance, is the legendary Matterhorn, the Swiss mountain made famous by Disney. To our right, is Helbronner, the Italian border station, which can be reached by riding another cable car three miles over to the Italian side. And there, so close we can almost reach out and touch it, stands the queen of these Alps—Mont Blanc—whose name means “The White Mountain.” Mont Blanc towers 15,778 feet (4,809 meters) above sea level and is the highest peak in Western Europe and the 11th highest in the world. Below us, we can see several mountaineers beginning their long two-day trek to the summit of Mont Blanc. These are just a handful of the athletes who attempt the trip each year.



Photo of mountaineers climbing Mont Blanc, taken by Brady Johnson, all rights reserved.

The first recorded ascent of Mont Blanc was on August 8, 1786 by Jacques Balmat and Doctor Michel Paccard. This event traditionally marks the advent of the sport of modern mountaineering. The first woman to reach the summit was Marie Paradis just 22 years later in 1808. Now fast forward 200 years to the present: over 20,000 adventure seekers tackle this extraordinary feat and climb to the summit of Mont Blanc every year.

There's one more thing I want you to see before we head back down the mountain. A couple of years ago, a glass box was constructed of super-thick, reinforced glass that dangles off the viewing platform with a drop of 1035 meters (3,396 feet) straight down, so that you and I can "step into the void" and appreciate the dizzying **altitude** of these glorious mountains. Care to step in and give it a try? I should warn you... you have to take off your shoes and leave anything, including your camera, that might drop off your person to ensure that nothing damages the glass. But don't worry, it's safe. Go ahead. Step into the Void.

It's a twenty minute wait for the next cable car going down, so let's enjoy a cup of hot cocoa in the café here at the top of the Alps before we descend back down to earth. By the way, did you know that directly beneath us, deep below this mountain, there is another structure carved out from the moun-

tain? It's called the Mont Blanc Tunnel, a 7-mile Trans-Alpine route that runs right through the heart of the mountain connecting France to Italy. It was constructed back in the 1950's and makes traveling between the two countries much quicker than it used to be. What used to take days can now be accomplished in a matter of minutes.

What an unforgettable adventure to travel up this mountain! But Mont Blanc and the téléphérique are not the only things to explore in this area. Back down in Chamonix, we can ride the train to the Mer de Glace (Sea of Ice) glacier and walk right into a glittering ice palace. Every year, a tunnel is drilled into the glacier, so that world travelers like you and me can experience and touch the cold blue ice that is only found within the heart of a glacier.



My son, Brady, and I stepped into the Void, all rights reserved.

Would you agree that looking at the outside of a glacier is unimpressive? It collects dirt as it snakes its way down the mountainside. But the inside? Well, that is something else entirely. After we disembark from the train, we'll ride another lift and climb down 400 stairs to the entrance of the crystal cave. It's not difficult to get down. It's the climbing back up those 400 steps that worries me!

Well, take a look inside. Step inside. Go further back into the depths of the glacier. What do you think? Would you agree that the blue ice of a glacier is simply stunning, unlike any shade of blue you have ever seen?

What a day! Tomorrow, we leave France. It has been eye-opening to learn about the history and geography of this nation, the largest in Europe. Tonight we will sleep before our next big adventure—Switzerland, the land of cheese and cows, steep mountains and rolling hills. But before we go, shall we enjoy one more delicious and very French meal? We'll have fondue in Switzerland, most likely, so tonight we'll try a regional favorite—raclette. Raclette is a semi-firm cow's cheese perfect for melting.



Mer de Glace, taken by Terri Johnson, all rights reserved.

Here in the French Alps, restaurants serve raclette attached to a gadget (called a raclette machine) that melts the cheese for you at your table. Simply scrape off the melted cheese and dredge the gooey goodness over boiled potatoes, sliced ham, prosciutto, and assorted vegetables. Delicious! Au revoir, la France! It's been a pleasure getting to know you.

Tell me what you remember about...

The French Alps:

What is the highest mountain in Europe outside of the Caucasus Range and where is it located?

Tell me what you remember about the Alps. Would you ride the téléphérique, "step into the void," or tour the inside of a glacier?

Which town was the home of the first Winter Olympics and in what year did they take place? Which sport would you like to try if you visited this town?