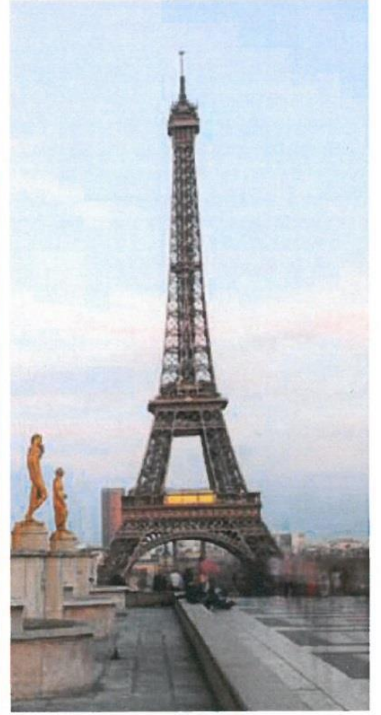
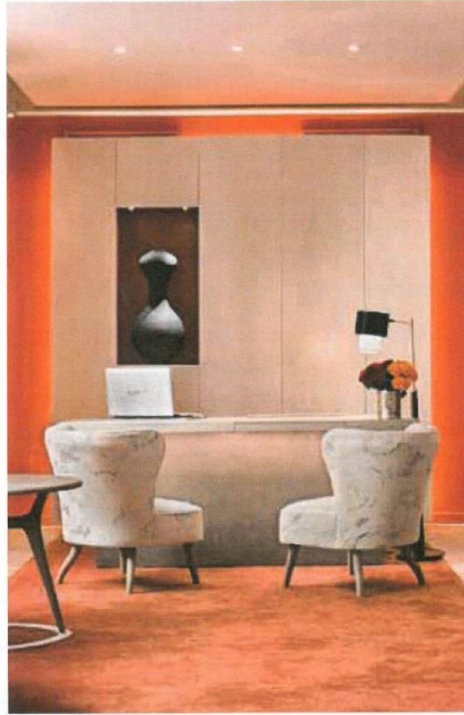
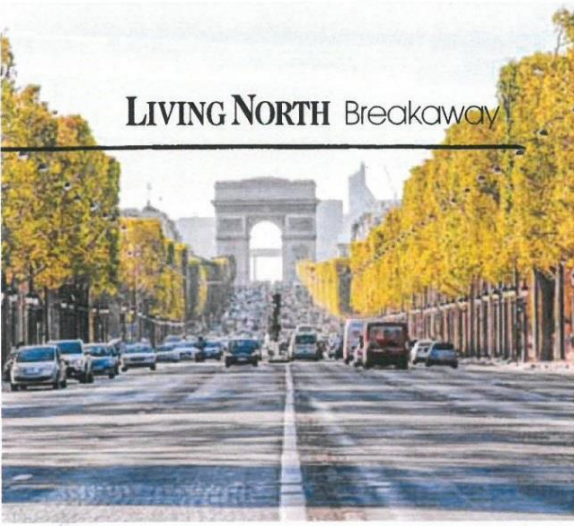


LIVING NORTH Breakaway



A Bon Voyage

We came, we saw, we ate too many crêpes, but in the end we conquered Paris – all in two days

I'll let you in on a little secret, I'd never been on a city break before. Until now. I wasn't really sure what to make of them; would I end up just running around trying to fit in everything I wanted to see, buy, eat, drink, visit and do, and feel unsatisfied that my time was limited and too short? I couldn't really see the appeal – I like my holidays to be leisurely with a sprinkling of sightseeing.

I was already panicking whether I would fit in everything on my to-do list as we boarded our early flight to Paris on the Saturday morning. My husband wasn't particularly helpful with the decision-making, stating that, 'As long as I eat a Nutella crêpe, I'll be happy.' Well, at least he would be easily pleased.

We touched down in Paris at 9.30am, and immediately set off exploring as our check-in time at our hotel, Le Pavillon Des Lettres near Avenue des Champs-Élysées, wasn't until 2pm. We had travelled light, with just carry-on luggage, which meant that we didn't have any big suitcases to drag around. Debating whether to get the RER train or Roissy Bus which takes you directly into the centre of Paris from the airport, we opted for the bus, paid our €11 fare each and took in the sights as we rode into the city centre.

The bus dropped us off at the Palais Garnier, where we decided to stroll down Avenue de l'Opéra (stopping at a tiny little crêperie along the way for an obligatory Nutella crêpe, which ended up being the first of many) and visit the Louvre.

We saw the Mona Lisa, which was overcrowded, as expected, with everyone trying to take a selfie with the painting, while across the hall the spectacular Les Noces de Cana, which filled the whole wall, was rather overlooked in comparison, and The Winged Victory of Samothrace sculpture was my personal favourite. We hailed a taxi to take us to the four-star Le Pavillon Des Lettres – a contemporary, literary-themed hotel with 26 rooms.

Instead of numbers, each room is named after a letter in the alphabet, which spells out the surname of a famous author. S for Shakespeare, W for Woolf – we were in room C for Calderón, a Spanish playwright, poet and writer. It could easily have been a tacky theme, but the little touches of a book by the author and some quotes on the bathroom door and wall blended into the rest of the room with its muted tones of gold, white and copper to create an elegant finish.

Our room boasted a balcony with a fantastic view of the Eiffel Tower above the rooftops of the surrounding buildings. After chatting to the staff at the front desk, we discovered that we were in a prime location for sightseeing, with our nearest Metro station on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

We bought a single ticket (€1.80 each) but decided to walk along the Seine all the way to Notre Dame. The area was bustling. There were stretches of sand and deckchairs where families played, pop-up crêpe and ice cream stalls, football tournaments and magic shows under the bridges, and fun water features to cool off from the summer heat. We saw a group of fishermen sunbathing on deckchairs while watching their rods in the water below.

The rest of our day was spent in the Notre Dame (where we listened to a service – good timing there), eating éclairs from Huré (a popular patisserie chain), and exploring the nearby streets selling paintings, nicknacks and books. Le Pavillon Des Lettres doesn't have a hotel restaurant, although room service from a nearby restaurant is available, so we ate out at Bouillon Chartier – a traditional Parisian restaurant that has been around since 1896 – which had a fabulous atmosphere.

On arrival back at our hotel room, we were greeted with a chocolate on each pillow and room service cards for breakfast the following morning. You can dine in the lounge area, which

also has an honesty bar, but we decided to indulge ourselves with breakfast in bed.

Promptly at 9am the following morning there was a knock on the door. Our breakfast tray was brimming with a basket of freshly baked croissants,

pain au chocolat and bread rolls, two mugs of hot chocolate, small plates of cured meats and cheese, omelettes and a bowl of fruit salad. We were set for the day.

My fear of not doing enough while in Paris had faded, and in between a visit to the luxury macaron boutique Ladurée which was just down the street from the hotel (Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré), and a walk to the Arc de Triomphe, we spent the day relaxing in Jardin des Tuileries, al fresco people-watching from pavement cafés, and a late-night visit to the Trocadéro to see the Eiffel Tower.

Our early morning start the following day was made easier by Le Pavillon Des Lettres arranging for a driver to take us directly to the airport. As we left, I glanced down at my to-do list that I had hastily written on the plane. All ticked off, and in only two days. It felt like we'd been away for a week. City breaks, you and I are going to get along quite nicely from now on.

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