

From the Capital of Everything to the Capital Itself

Wednesday, 19 November 2025 – A Frost-Lit crossing of France

With Gwen's calm hand on the wheel of the day and the skies holding their icy stillness from dawn almost 'till dusk, we lived through one of those great travel days that put « adventure » back into OAT. Today was not just a transfer from Lyon to Paris. It was a masterclass in timing, teamwork, and travelling with grace through a country dusted in winter light.

A Frosty Start & A Smooth Escape from Lyon

Our morning began with the first challenge of the day: Nikolai, our luggage-van driver, was delayed by heavy traffic. But with the efficiency of a well-oiled machine, we managed to load everything just in time—bags safely stored, travelers warm and ready, and spirits high.

Our van drivers, Sofiane and Osman, navigated the quiet, cold streets of Lyon with steady confidence, bringing us to Gare de Perrache. Inside the station, we made a delightful discovery: a short-story distributor, those whimsical literary totems that print one-minute tales for free. As French travelers waited for their trains—some reading Proust, others tapping on iPhones—our group joined in, taking home pockets of paper and poetry.

Boarding the train was effortless. Once on the TGV, we settled into our seats and watched the landscapes unfold. The entire countryside looked as if France had been painted white overnight—fields, vineyards, and rooftops glazed with frost, the world sparkling under a pale northern sun. It was an uneventful ride in the best possible sense: smooth, silent, serene.

Becoming Métro Masters

If the morning had been quiet, the afternoon demanded agility. Today required several métro rides, each one handled with precision and cool professionalism. By lunchtime, we moved through Paris's underground like locals.

Our first ride took us straight to Hôtel de Ville, the majestic City Hall rebuilt after the 1871 Paris Commune and today the seat of municipal power. Gwen unraveled its layers of history—fires, revolutions, mayors, and celebrations—before we continued on foot through the crisp winter air.

Beaubourg Warmth & Crêperie Comfort

We walked through the Beaubourg district, past the bold pipes-on-the-outside Centre Pompidou, a 1970s architectural provocation that still stirs debate, and the colorful Stravinsky Fountain, dancing even in the cold. At Crêperie Beaubourg, warm galettes, buttery crêpes, and bowls of cider awaited us, offering the perfect midday pause.

Through Canal Saint-Martin & Bastille: Parisian History Beneath Our Feet

After lunch, we hopped back on the métro and traveled through two of Paris's most storied quarters:

- Canal Saint-Martin, engineered under Napoleon to bring fresh water (and cleaner streets) to the city; later beloved by painters, poets, and Amélie Poulain.
- Place de la Bastille, where the infamous prison once stood—stormed on 14 July 1789, marking the symbolic birth of the French Revolution. Today, the July Column rises where royal tyranny once loomed.

From there, we reached our hotel, where check-in unfolded in true Parisian chaos—phones ringing, luggage carts missing, staff darting in all directions. But soon rooms were assigned, keys distributed, and laughter restored.

Paris by Night: The Gilded Flame & The Seine in Sparkles

Later that evening, wrapped in scarves and excitement, we ventured out again. A night-ride métro carried us to Pont de l'Alma, where we paused before the gilded Flame—a full-scale replica of the Statue of Liberty's torch and, in recent decades, a spontaneous memorial.

Then it was time for our Bateaux-Mouches nighttime cruise. Paris shimmered in reflection as we glided beneath her bridges:

- Notre-Dame, rising in scaffolding yet still magnificent
- the stern medieval towers of La Conciergerie
- the glowing clock of the Musée d'Orsay
- the Eiffel Tower, sparkling right on cue

By night, the Seine becomes a ribbon of gold, and Paris—already luminous by day—reveals her most intimate self.

A Warm Ending to a Glacial Day

Returning by métro, we walked only a few steps to reach our hotel, where a lovely local dinner awaited us—warm dishes, shared toasts, and the soft hum of content conversation. Outside, the cold deepened. Inside, everything was gentle.

By the time we slipped into our comfortable beds, the hotel—so chaotic at check-in—felt astonishingly peaceful. Paris slept. And so did we, grateful for a day of winter magic, smooth travel, and quiet triumphs.