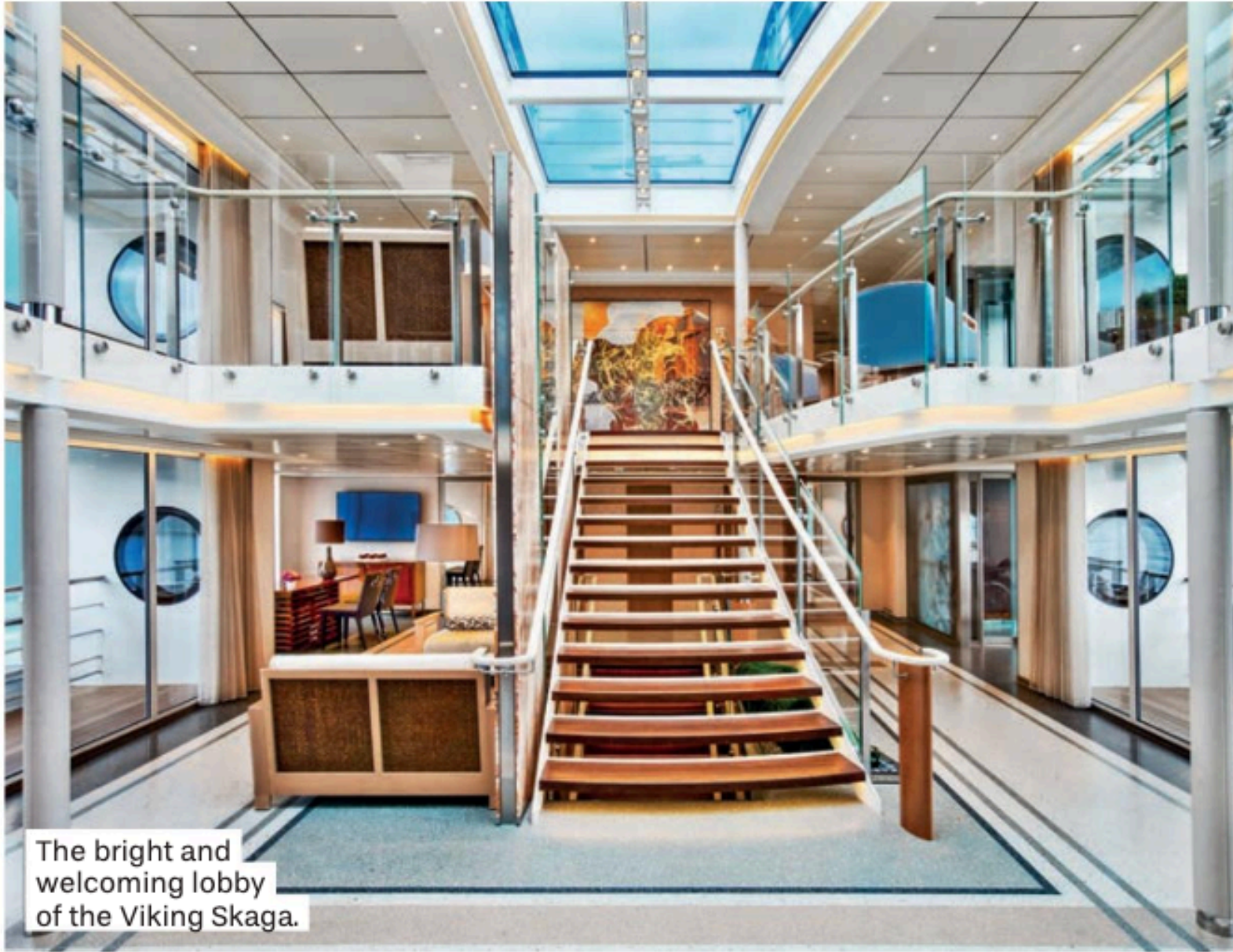
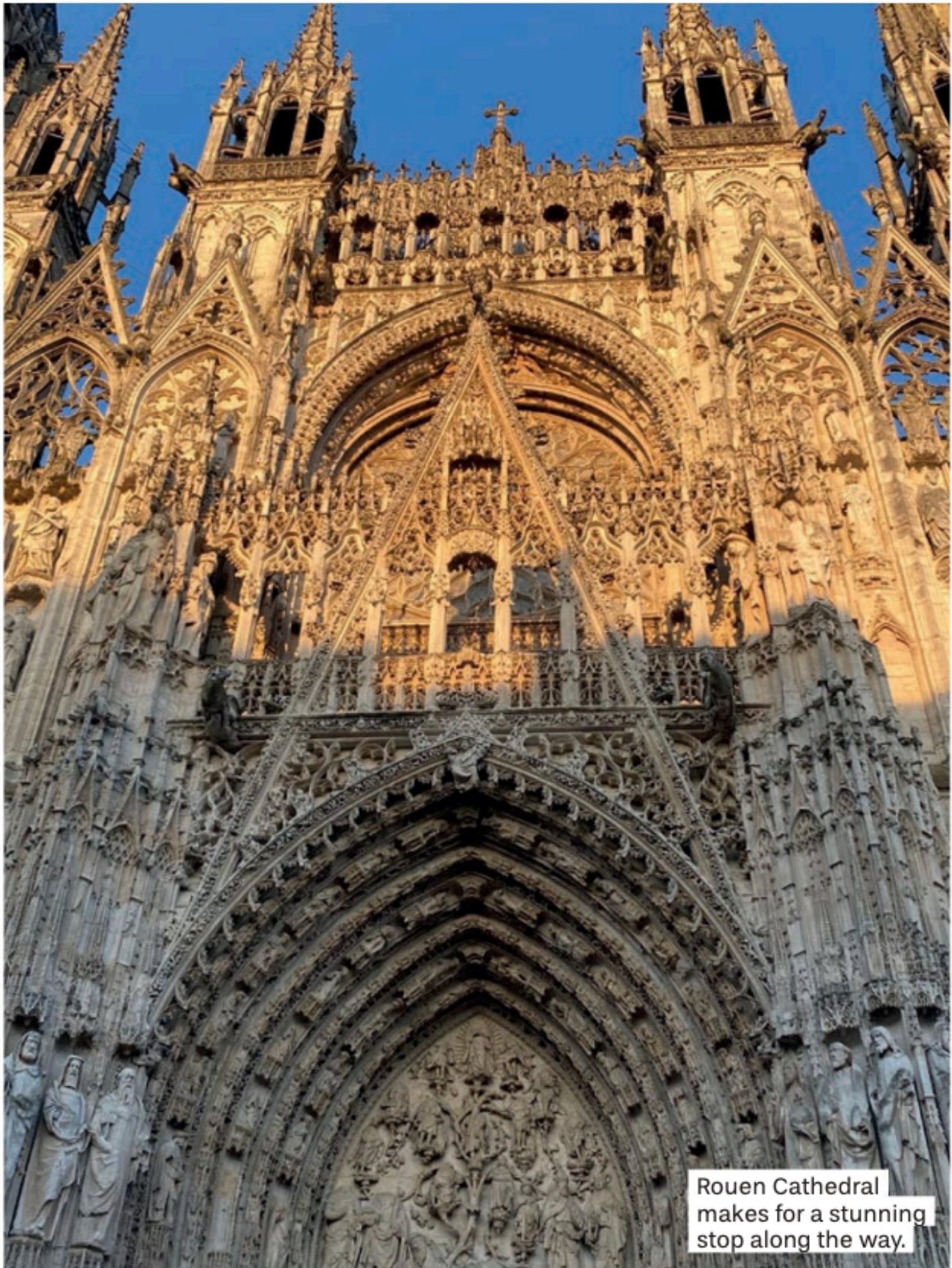




In Seine memories



Travel writer Jane Wilson enjoys a Viking River Cruise from Paris to Central Normandy, and reflects on the cultural treasures she'll never forget.

Monet painting came to mind as I watched the silhouette of the iconic Eiffel Tower shimmer on the river Seine as the veil of mist unfolded to awaken the romance of Paris. I heard the bustle of brasseries and aproned waiters serve baskets of baguettes, croissants and cups of café au lait. Bonjour Paris!

I was standing on the deck of a Viking ship, elegant in white and contemporary in design, docked at its privileged location minutes from the heart of the city. The Viking Skaga was accessorised with subtle designer features; onboard accents that evoke Viking customs. Fresh, clean and Scandinavian in looks, with a nod to its Nordic heritage, this was a modern

creation of the Viking longship for today's discerning traveller. Understated elegance.

There were five accommodation categories, all tasteful, restful and airy. My Veranda Stateroom, all 205 square foot of it, had modern touches such as free wi-fi, ample storage space, and premium Freyja toiletries in a bright compact bathroom warmed by underfloor heating and the all-important anti-fog mirrors – thank you Viking! Floor to ceiling windows opened to a full-size veranda and my private viewing platform. The outside invaded the room flooding it in light, a concept which flowed throughout the ship. Assured of a fresh river breeze and 360-degree views, the sun-deck never failed to deliver,

whether relaxing on a sun-lounger or spotting the chef pick ingredients from his outdoor herb garden. For those wanting to top up their fitness, the walking track paved the way and for those in need of a more sedate experience, nabbing the front row seat of this cinematic-like journey while sipping a cocktail was the order of the day. In the atrium, the popular library was tucked snugly in the corner.

There was an appetite for the chef's regional specialties tasting menu; think escargots à la bourguignonne, sirloin beef with Café de Paris sauce, and Paris-Brest (choux pastry with praline cream). A choice of classic dishes was always available as well as a dinner menu selection. Once a week there is a French night with beret-

wearing waiters serving a medley of French dishes. Lunch was a lighter affair with salads and soups, breakfast was a buffet. Seating was open-plan. The Aquavit Terrace at the front of the ship presented alfresco dining as well as an enviable space perfect for observing life on the riverbanks.

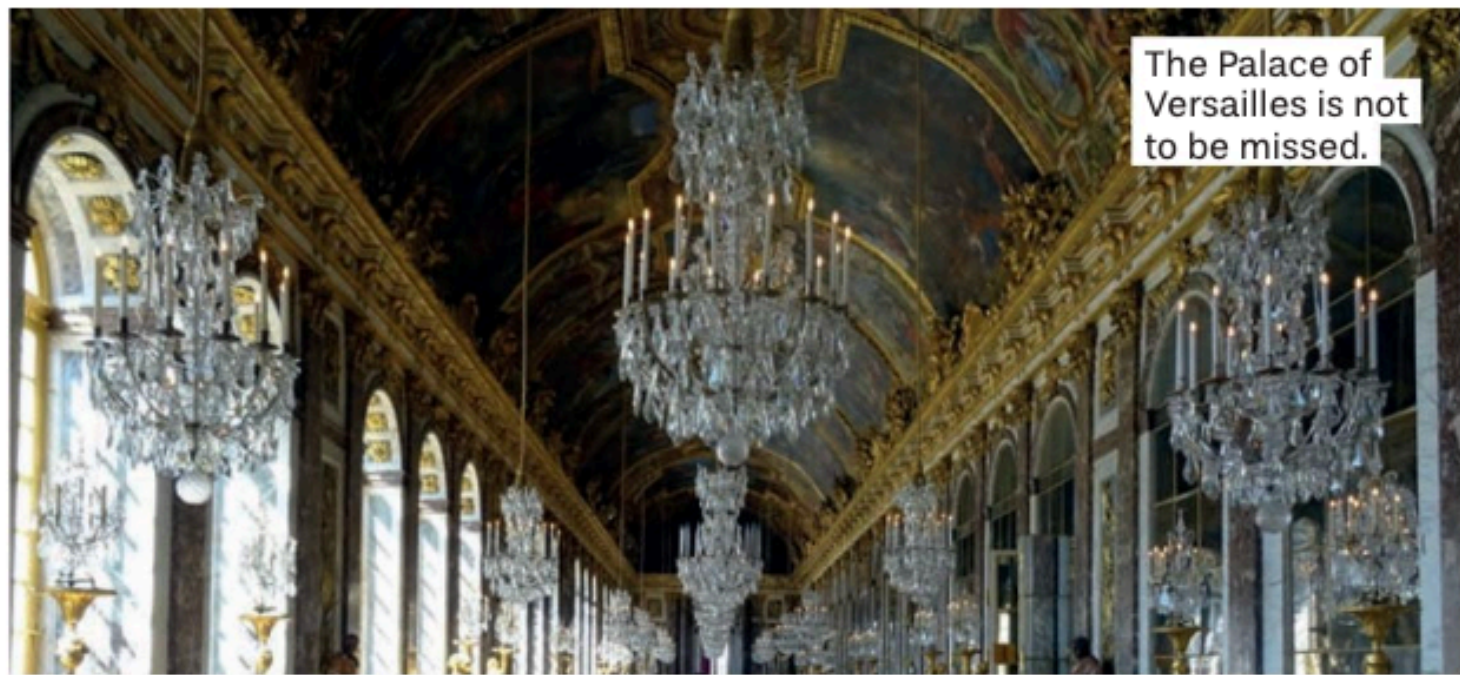
DISCOVERING HISTORY

Listed as *Paris & The Heart Of Normandy*, this eight-day itinerary included two days in Paris, the city of lights, love and art. Brimming with fashion, the city is the home of Coco Chanel and Dior who line the Champs-Élysées with elegant and classy displays, which I passed on a coach tour, face splayed against the pane for a closer look. Driving

WORDS: JANE WILSON. IMAGES: JANE WILSON AND VIKING CRUISES.



Visit the iconic Japanese bridge at Monet's garden in Giverny.



The Palace of Versailles is not to be missed.

by the Louvre and Arc de Triomphe proved more like an architectural line-up. Viking includes an excursion in each destination with optional choices. A second tour, *Flavors Of Paris*, whet my appetite for French fare, with locally-cured meats and cheeses, tastings of Burgundy and Bordeaux, artisan chocolates and macarons while sauntering through medieval passageways. As host city to the Olympics, a visit to SPOT24, the Olympic museum (until December 31), was a must before setting sail and mingling with fellow passengers who were mostly American; friends enjoying their early retirement, a granddaughter and grandmother duo,

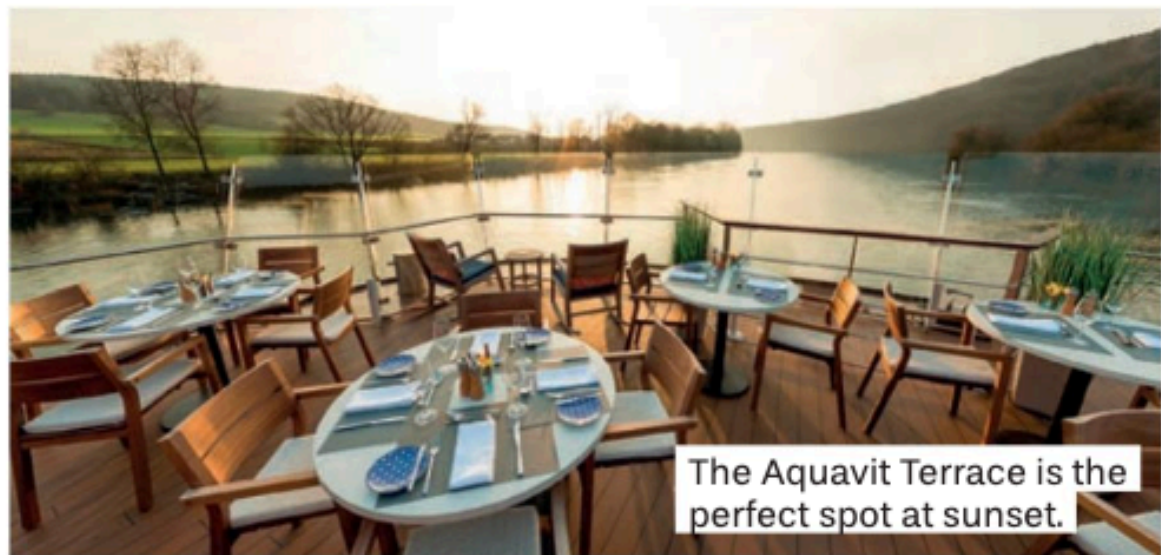
and a newly engaged couple – she said yes under the Eiffel Tower! And of course, weaving between were the smiling staff, eager to please and delivering the highest of service.

Swan-like and serene, the ship glided under bridges, navigated locks, passed rustic buildings and spied million-euro mansions decorating the hillsides, leaving ripples in its wake. Viking longships have the agility to dock in the heart of riverside villages, towns and cities, only a hop away from bucket-list destinations.

The itinerary followed a trail of castles and chateaux. The fortified 12th-century castle of La Roche-Guyon dominating the village below;

the ruins of Château Gaillard built by Richard the Lionheart, a towering example of a Normandy fortress in Les Andelys; and Napoleon's Château de Malmaison in Le Pecq, where he spent his final days. The grandeur of the Palace of Versailles, the home of French Royalty embellished in gold was a splendid sight; the famed Hall of Mirrors glittered and sparkled in its corridor of glass and crystal chandeliers. It was here where the Treaty of Versailles was signed and ended World War I. Outside were sprawling landscaped gardens dotted with lakes and life-size statues.

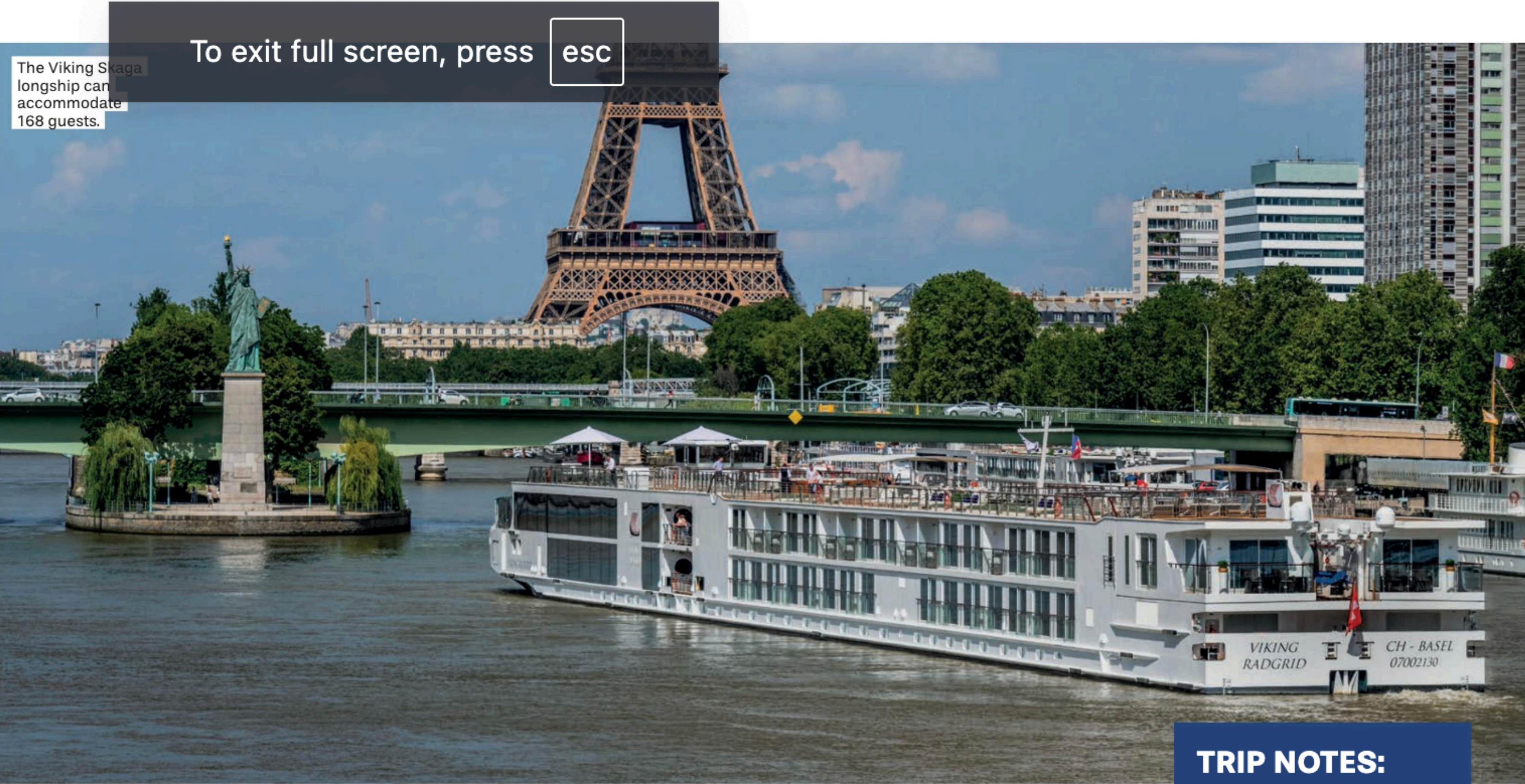
Pedaling on a squeaky bicycle through fields of poppies, I cycled to



The Aquavit Terrace is the perfect spot at sunset.



A chic and cosy Veranda Stateroom.



The Viking Skaga longship can accommodate 168 guests.

To exit full screen, press **esc**

Giverny, Monet's house and gardens, now a museum. Strolling through the garden I, like Monet, was spellbound by the vision before me. The romantic Japanese bridge arched over lotus-filled ponds, shaded by weeping willows and choreographed by dancing light rays. This was the inspiration for his masterful canvases, capturing the essence of light and beauty.

THE CRUISING SPIRIT

With its clean lines and light woods, the lounge was the social hub of the ship, a place to gather new friends and enjoy the evening's entertainment: an operatic performance, music by local artists, or a quiz hosted by the cruise director. And centre stage was the clinker-built bar, which paid tribute to the Viking longships of the past along with high-backed, embroidered chairs. Most evenings, enrichment lectures complemented the onshore excursions. These proved invaluable, especially during a walking tour of Rouen, passing the 14th-century abbey where the valiant young Joan of Arc was sentenced to death. Cobbled

stone passageways led me to the gold face of the astronomical clock and to the Gothic cathedral lit in fairytale style.

I had no idea the Bayeux Tapestry was 70 metres of embroidered storytelling. Donning a headset, I joined the lengthy line to listen to the tale of the conquest of England. But nothing prepared me for the visit to the Normandy beaches, which will stay forever in my mind and at such a poignant time. The sobering silence was deafening. The collective respect, the remembrance of bravery, and the sacrifice of those lives lost was deeply visible at the British Ranville cemetery. Head bowed and a tear shed, I was humbled.

Over the eight days I had adopted the insatiable Viking spirit of discovery, exploring castles and cathedrals, palaces and Paris. I dawdled in gardens, cycled pastoral landscapes and cried on the beach. Monet captured his visions of France on canvas but Viking set the route for a gallery of cinematic views and experiences. Back in Paris, the

TRIP NOTES:

Paris & The Heart of Normandy Cruise starts from £2,695 per person for the March 27–April 3, 2025 sailing, based on current availability. The voyage celebrates history, art, food and culture and includes stops in Paris, La Roche-Guyon, Vernon, Rouen, Normandy Beaches, Les Andelys, and Le Pecq, with six guided tours. Includes return flights from the UK (including from London and selected regional airports), seven nights in a Standard Stateroom, in-destination transfers, all onboard meals including wine, beer and soft drinks with lunch and dinner (no corkage fee), included excursion in each port of call, wi-fi, evening entertainment and enrichment talks. Visit [viking.com](https://www.viking.com) to book.

Eiffel Tower dazzled on the Seine as darkness descended. I won't be painting the reflections, instead my pictures will be etched in memory long after disembarking my Viking cruise.