

*Dogs love Paris, and Paris
welcomes them without
raising an eyebrow.*

Joie de Vivre

BY PHOEBE COLLINS

THE SKY WAS STILL DARK WHEN AIR France flight 23 from New York approached Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport on a cold winter's morning in late January. After filling out the immigration landing card, I checked again not only for my passport, but also for the carefully compiled sheaf of veterinary papers tucked into the same holder. All was in place. As the cabin pressure changed slightly and the final descent began, I reached down to reassure my traveling

The Grenelle Bridge offers a fantastic view of the Eiffel Tower to dogs and their owners.



companion Emma—a 2-year-old Pekinese—snuggled in her kennel carrier beneath the seat.

The large brown eyes which met mine registered an array of emotions: fear, confusion and that miraculous trust so familiar to all dog owners. Emma had been on airplanes before, but never for a flight of more than an hour's duration. Today, we had spent more than seven hours in the air and crossed the Atlantic Ocean.

"Don't worry," I whispered through the bars of her carrier. "You'll love France—the dogs here live the life of Riley!" At least, that was the impression I had received on previous visits, and now I anxiously hoped that it would prove true—especially after subjecting my best friend to the ordeal of such a long journey in confined quarters.

GALLIC CUSTOMS

The customs officer who stamped my passport gave not even a cursory glance at the proffered veterinary papers—my first experience with the typical Gallic attitude toward dogs. In France, being accompanied by a dog is considered no more unusual than having a purse or a briefcase, and it attracts little attention. Emma and I exchanged quizzical looks before I shrugged and said, "Oh, well. *Bienvenue a Paris!* We made it!"

What a relief it was to find ourselves at last outside in the fresh air where, after a discreet "comfort stop" (well-earned after Emma had held it so heroically during that long flight), we joined the taxi line. A few minutes later, as we sped briskly along the Peripherique, a huge yellow sun rose slowly in the east—the City of Light awaited us.

The driver exited at Porte Maillot, affording us a brief glimpse of the famous Bois du Boulogne. An instant later, we caught our breath as the car circled the imposing magnificence of the Arc de Triomphe. Continuing on down the Avenue Marceau, we headed toward the River Seine and that most quintessential of all Parisian sights, the Eiffel Tower.

Later that afternoon, having rested and settled into our apartment, we set out for our first walk. Eager to explore our new surroundings, we strolled over to the Quai d'Orsay and found a lovely little park that overlooked the Seine.

LES CHIENS DE PARIS

Coming from New York City, I was interested to see what differences, if any, were evident in *les chiens de Paris*. The first difference that struck me was the condition of the sidewalks. In New York City, where crime reigns supreme and every other form of litter known to mankind is



A Parisian taxi driver takes his Poodle to work with him.

tolerated, the "pooper scooper" law is vigilantly enforced. Not so in Paris. As tempting as it is to gaze upward and admire the beautiful architecture while strolling along the boulevards, pedestrians are best advised to keep a sharp eye on the ground. More often than not, it is a veritable minefield of *merde*.

This, however, was my only negative experience.

The most outstanding characteristic apparent in the dogs of Paris is one that they often share with their owners: *joie de vivre*. This was made obvious right away by the number of dogs walking unleashed through the ancient winding streets, obediently keeping out of the traffic, secure in the knowledge that they are perfectly welcome almost anywhere.

Unlike America, where dogs are strictly forbidden entry into stores, here in Paris their presence causes no trouble at all. Dogs are even permitted in the supermarket. They may sit up front by the door (keeping the cashiers company) or, if small enough to fit in a bag, accompany their owners through the aisles. Fond glances, affectionate strokes and happy exclamations of "*ah . . . mignon!*" are the order of the day, whether we are in an elegant department store or the neighborhood greengrocers.

Small dogs—again provided they are in a bag—are also permitted on the city buses. The same rule is in effect on the Metro, though it is not enforced as it is above-ground. Breeds of all shapes and

sizes are commonly spotted in the subway. During rush hour, it is a treat to see so many 9-to-5 dogs accompanying their owners to and from work.

BILLET DE CHIEN

Our first train trip on the French railroad was also a delight. For the equivalent of \$10, I purchased a *billet de chien* (dog ticket) and boarded the train for the four-hour ride to Avignon. As we settled into our window seat, Emma spread out comfortably on the floor by my feet—I chuckled to myself at the memory of a phone call I'd once made to Amtrak. Innocently inquiring if dogs were allowed on the train, I received a horrified response from the official at the other end of the line, "No! Absolutely not!" I felt as though, instead of a harmless pooch, I'd asked

to transport firearms or illegal contraband.

Rather than being viewed as possible germ or rabies carriers—something unclean or dangerous—dogs are openly welcomed just about anywhere in France. Dogs' loyalty and unconditional love are revered and, as a result, the canines in France are the friendliest I have ever encountered. They seem to have an innate sense of their special place in society and take pride in it. From the gentle German Shepherds found at most any *tabac* to the pampered Fox Terrier whose owner squires him around town in a sidecar attached to his motorcycle to the tiny miniature spitz who proudly guards the local toy store, the French dogs are indeed a "breed apart."

Along with a wide variety of adorable mutts, the most popular purebreds are terriers (Westies, Scotties, Yorkshire, Cairn and Fox), Brittanys and Cocker Spaniels, French Bulldogs, Poodles (of course!) and German Shepherds. A liberal sprinkling of Pokes, Lhasas and Shih Tzu rounds out the population. As in the United States, Labrador Retrievers are also much beloved. A minor *crise d'etat* occurred when the late President Francois Mitterand's Lab wandered off the grounds of the Elysee Palace and disappeared. Affairs of state ground to a halt! After appearing on national television to make an emotional plea for the dog's return, the president and Mme. Mitterand were thrilled when their pet was soon located through the local pound (he was just fine,

it turned out, having already been adopted by an elderly dog lover) and safely returned to the family.

VIANDE ANIMAUX

My first inspection of the commercial canned dog foods available at the supermarkets and pet stores left me bewildered. None of them were up to snuff; they contained an unacceptable level of chemicals. (This inspection was the source of my all-time-worst gaffe in the French language. I insisted on a brand without preservatives: “*sans conservatifs*.” Little did I know that *preservatif* means condom in French.) Fortunately, I later learned that the neighborhood *boucherie* (butcher) saved scraps especially for dogs, *viande animaux*. Since then, my dog’s diet has evolved to include this inexpensive, fresh meat mixed with vegetables and dry kibble. Needless to say, she thrives. The butcher, Monsieur Coudet, proud owner of two Dachshunds, meticulously trims off all the fat before serving up my order.

The only threat to a dog’s diet in France is the plethora of generous folks in the bakeries and cafes who love to indulge dogs with sweets. Indeed, dogs are always welcome, along with their owners, in most restaurants. One need

never dine alone! Often, a bowl of water will be immediately served—the dog’s comfort attended to first—a courtesy that no doubt further reassures them of their status in French society.

VETERINAIRE AND OTHER CARE

I found a veterinarian, Dr. Sylvain Moggia, who is Paris’ answer to James Herriot. His office is in the charming Montmartre quarter, a stone’s throw from the massive basilica of Sacre Coeur, and overlooks Paris at the top of the Butte. Fortunately, Emma has not had any serious health problems but it’s reassuring to know that “*SOS Veterinaire*” is on call 24 hours a day should any emergencies arise. Free clinics abound for rabies vaccinations, as well—another reassuring development.

When it comes to grooming, any Pekingese owner knows that the breed is high maintenance. I’ve patronized many professional groomers in the United States, but I have never seen anything like “*Mon Bel Ami*,” Monsieur Jean-Pierre Hery’s establishment on the Avenue de la Bourdonnais in the seventh *arrondissement*. The quality of their work, their amazing speed and efficiency, are all carried off with an unruffled *savoir-faire*. It was a revelation. It was certainly a new experience to be lectured and scolded about my sudden lack of expertise. Three hours after Emma’s arrival, I picked up an immaculately groomed and happy dog. And, happily for my wallet, the price was commensurate with what I usually paid at home.

Tattooing has caught on in a big way over here, as it ensures the easy identification and return of any lost dog. With the canine population in Paris numbering 200,000 at last count, it’s not hard to see why this method has become so popular. According to the SPA (*Societe de Protection des Animaux*, the French equivalent of our SPCA), more often than not runaways are safely reunited with their families, and stolen dogs are more readily identified and returned.

Expressing their love for dogs in an unabashedly enthusiastic manner, the French are always ready to spoil beloved dogs—theirs and yours. As usual, dogs wiggle their way past the customary barriers to new people, new places, new adventures, inviting interaction with a wag of their tails. With its enchanting sights and dog-loving ways, Paris is an ideal vacation destination for dog owners. 🐾

Dog’s Paradise

If you are planning to fly to France, Emma’s highest rating goes to Air France. It is the only carrier that permits her the privilege of stretching her legs in the aisles. European carriers tend to allow small dogs to stay with their owners in the cabin, as long as their kennel carriers fit under the seats. North American carriers on trans-Atlantic flights require all pets to travel in the pressurized cargo hold.

Don’t forget to bring copies of your veterinarian’s health clearance and your dog’s latest vaccination records. Also, make all your flight arrangements well in advance, advising everyone who will listen that your dog is accompanying you. It’s best not to surprise the airlines by springing your dog on them at the last minute.

The Air France flight personnel have always been wonderful and treated Emma like a queen. Air France is the only airline I trusted when she once had to fly alone from Toronto to Paris.

Phoebe Collins is a freelance writer and novelist based in Paris with her dog Emma.