

A Very Good Holiday

This summer, I went back to France with my wife, in order to attend my sister's wedding. Despite being my wife's fifth or sixth visit – we lost count – this was the first time she travelled to my home country in summer, so we were both excited. However, the trip did not start ideally, because we had to endure a grand total of 18 hours of flight, in addition to more than three hours of layover in Hanoi, because our plane was delayed. To make things worse, the cabin was full of families with young children and infants, and it was so noisy that we had trouble sleeping.

Fortunately, our vacation took a completely different turn from the moment we landed in Paris. First of all, the temperature was heavenly cool. Summer in Japan can be a very challenging ordeal, and the 15-degree drop we experienced when we passed the airport gates was more than welcomed. Secondly, my parents brought us homemade liver pâté sandwiches, one of my favorites. What a perfect way to start two-week summer *vacances* ! You never realise you miss something until it comes right under your nose.

The car journey from the airport to my family home, which took two hours in a straight line down the highway, was joyful and exciting, as we caught up on things that transpired in the past months, while a feeling of expectation was filling up the vehicle, for everyone was looking forward to those holidays.

After a quick summery lunch in the garden, we headed towards the *Baie de Somme*, the large estuary of the Somme River, situated 90 kilometers westwards from our home. Famed for its galloping tides and the seals that inhabit it, the *Baie de Somme* encompasses the two towns that we visited. The first town was Le Crotoy, the only seaside resort in Northern France to have a southerly exposure to its relaxing broad and sandy beach. The second was Saint-Valery-sur-Somme, where we enjoyed walking through the streets lined with the deep-brick reds of old fishermen houses decorated with marine motifs. Up the hill are the remains of the walled medieval town, including a gate through which Jeanne d'Arc passed as a prisoner more than 550 years ago on her way to Normandy, where she was executed. From Saint-Valery, we also went for a nature excursion on the estuary and watched the seals that lounge on the Pointe du Hourdel sandbanks.

We stayed two nights on the outskirts of Saint-Valery at a bed and breakfast. The owner had two big dogs, an Australian Shepherd and a Bernese Mountain Dog. My wife spent all her free time playing with them, kicking footballs and throwing sticks around for the dogs to fetch. She was having so much fun that she would forget everything else, including meals and sightseeing. I realised that because she grew up with dogs around her, it had been tough for her to live without them. Of course, our cats are cute and funny too, but outdoor activities with humans are hardly their forte. I was myself very happy to see her enjoying her stay.

Finally, after three days spent by the sea, we headed back home, and it was wedding time. The account of the two-day festivities, in addition to the preparations, would be worth another story, but here I just want to highlight one thing that touched me. Of course, the wedding was the opportunity for family and friends to come together and meet again after a long time apart. I watched with great contentment as my wife greeted everyone with a smiling *bise*, something that she was very reluctant to do in the past, as it involves body contact.

A very good holiday indeed.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. Is the narrator's wife from France?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: « Despite being her fifth or sixth visit (we lost count), this was the first time my wife travelled to my home country in that season » suggests that she never lived in France. « I

witnessed with great contentment my wife greeting everyone with a smiling bise, something that she was very reluctant to do in the past, as it involves body contact » implies that the narrator's wife is not used to the common French way of greeting family and friends..

2. What country does the narrator live in?

Answer: Japan.

Hints/Clues: « Summer in Japan can be a very challenging ordeal, and the 15-degree drop we experienced when we passed the airport gates was more than welcomed » suggests that the departure point of their trip is Japan, which is also implied by the flights route and duration.

3. Does the narrator have a good relationship with his parents?

Answer: Yes.

Hints/Clues: « my parents brought us homemade liver pâté sandwiches, one of my favorites », « The car journey from the airport to my family home (...) was at the same time joyful and exciting, as we caught up on things that transpired in the past months, while a feeling of expectation was filling up the vehicle, for everyone was looking forward to those holidays » suggest so, while the fact that they go on a three-day trip together also implies as such.

4. How was the weather on the first day of the narrator's holidays in France?

Answer: Good.

Hints/Clues: « After a quick summery lunch in the garden » suggests that the weather was good enough to eat outside some kind of summer food such as salads.

5. What pet does the narrator have?

Answer: One (or more) cats(s).

Hints/Clues: « Of course, cats are cute and funny too, but outdoor activities with humans are hardly their forte » suggests that he has at least one cat.

6. Where does the narrator's wife come from (general region)?

Answer: Probably Asia.

Hints/Clues: « my wife greeting everyone with a smiling bise, something that she was very reluctant to do in the past, as it involves body contact » suggests that the narrator's wife comes from a country where common greetings do not involve touching each other. Most of such countries are found in Asia.