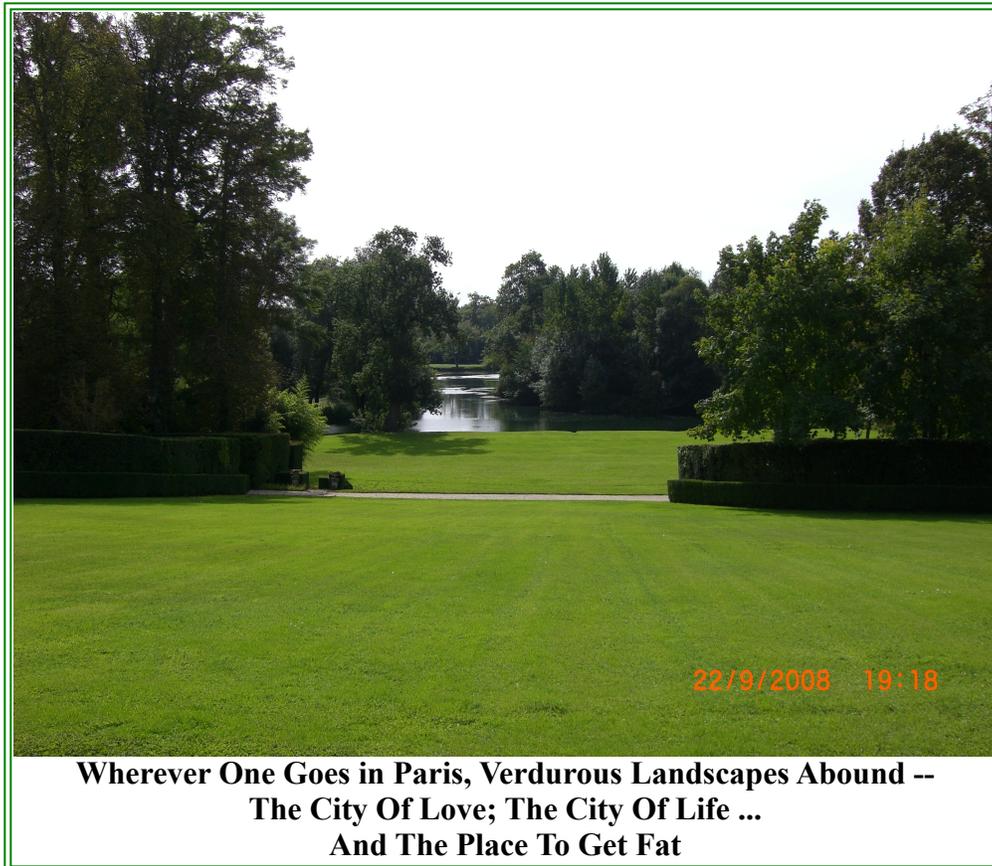


HÔTEL de CRILLON: BACK TO CIVILISATION

Just about everything that has ever been written in respect of the Capital City of France is substantially correct: It is, without doubt, the city of light, the city of love, the city of beauty, the city of history, the city of culture, having risen to a very high level ... and the city where one may indulge in nearly everybody's fancy.

But, for husbands and boyfriends, it is a treacherous place because females have a tendency to shop until they drop from utter exhaustion.

Alternatively, the money 'well' runs dry.



TARGET (泰達財經) entered Paris on Friday, September 19, 2008, after an uneventful one hour and 45-minute flight from Florence, Italy, aboard a Cityjet, operated by Air France.

Before moving onto **TARGET**'s adventures in Paris, however, a few words, first, about the ridiculous situation at the lone airport of Florence.

The non-stop drive from Cortona to Florence took about 2 hours, but it took the best part of one hour just to find the entrance to the airport.

The entrance to Florence Airport turned out to be a small lane, on the left of which was little more than a World War II lean-to, those dome-shaped huts that were erected overnight by the US Army engineers in order to house soldiers or to serve as storehouses for ammunition and what-have-you.

The arrival at Florence Airport at about 10 a.m. resulted in **TARGET**, having to wait about 6 hours in a stuffy little room because Air France does not permit an early check-in of luggage and, in addition, it is required that one stay with one's luggage at all times.

There are no restaurants at Florence Airport, but there is a small snack bar where one may buy a cold drink or a cup of coffee and a sandwich 'thing' and stand around to munch on the snack.

Security is very tight at the entire airport.

After checking in at about 2:15 p.m., it was required that **TARGET** proceed to the upper level of the airport in order to be examined by Italian police.

There, a female police officer refused to permit more than one bag per passenger, which included a woman's handbag and/or a laptop computer.

Down again to the check-in counter where a lovely Italian, Air France, ground-staff lady took pity and arranged for what, under normal circumstances, would have been carry-on luggage to become checked-in luggage.

Then, back again to the female Italian policewoman, who reminded **TARGET**, very much, of the Chinese axiom of a small-minded person, waving a chicken's feather as though it were a general's flag (雞毛當令箭).

Having had **TARGET**'s one bag screened, it was down the steps again to wait at Gate Number 3 for about one hour.

If **TARGET** Subscribers are unfortunate enough to visit the lone (international?) airport at Florence, they should be prepared for the worst: Little to no cool air circulates inside the airport building; no food of any consequence may be purchased at the airport; no first-class or any other reasonable lounge; and, little to no facilities for any class of passenger.

But the horrors of the moment at Florence Airport paled to insignificance when one recalled the natural beauty of Tuscany:

TUSCANY

*Wake to the morning's sun;
View nature's majestic harmony;
Listen! Taste! – Verdurous slopes;
Bouquets of herbs; The chirping of birds –
The air is pure and free!
This is Tuscany.*

*Pigeons fly from bough to bough,
Their coos break the silence of the early day,
From vineyard to vineyard,
From olive grove to olive grove,
The land is alive; one sits silently to smell and see:
This land called Tuscany.*

*When day ends and sun descends,
Obscured are groves, hills, and old church spires;
The failing light casts shadows over many an ancient vale;
And it is time to rest. But, first, view once again
The wonderment of this scenery:
Of Tuscany.*

*A dog barks in the distance, disturbing my silence;
A mild breeze stirs the leaves, the trees, devoid of fruit;
The smell of rosemary and sage still linger
When night's cloak falls.*

*I close my eyes. I reminisce. Nature's symphony:
That is Tuscany.*

Paris: The City of Light

Having fled Florence, Italy, Paris, France, represented civilisation.

This medium stayed at Hôtel de Crillon in Room 227.

This hotel is rated as being one of the best in Paris.

TARGET has no way to compare Hôtel de Crillon with other Parisian hotels, but one thing is certain: Hôtel de Crillon is not half as good as Hotel Adlon Kempinski of Berlin, Germany.

Hôtel de Crillon has 103 rooms, 39 suites and 5 prestige apartments.

The cost of the accommodation ranges from €750 for a tiny single room to €8,200 for the best suite, known as the Bernstein Suite.

By Hongkong standards, it is expensive.

By any standards, it is expensive.

The hotel overlooks Place de la Concorde and the view in the evenings is outstanding.

It was built in 1758 and it maintains many of its original features.

During World War II, it was billeted by the Vehrmacht and it was used by Chancellor Adolf Hitler when he made his single visit to the city.

Although the records are, today, rather sketchy about this period in the history of Hôtel de Crillon, it is claimed that this was the only hotel in Paris that got paid in cash for services to the Vehrmacht.

The name of the hotel is taken from the original family of Marquis de Crillon, but, today, it is owned, ultimately, by Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide Incorporated, which is listed on The New York Stock Exchange.

Some of the famous people who stayed at Hôtel de Crillon include:

Andrew Carnegie	Charlie Chaplin
Theodore Roosevelt	Emperor Hirohito
King George V	Sophia Loren
General Pershing	Jackie Kennedy Onassis
Winston Churchill	Orson Wells
Thomas Woodrow Wilson	Elizabeth Taylor

TARGET ate all breakfasts at the hotel and 2 evening meals, one at L'Obélisque, a brasserie, extraordinaire, and the fine-dining restaurant, named Les Ambassadeurs.

The meal at L'Obélisque was excellent, as was the service, the flexibility and attentiveness of the serving staff to all requests.

It was more than just filling one's belly with wonderful-tasting food; it was, also, a most-pleasant experience.

It was something of a shame that more meals could not have been eaten at L'Obélisque, but Paris has a very large selection of wonderful restaurants; and, there was a duty to be done.

The meal at L'Obélisque cost €138 for 2 people and comprised the following:

Cream of Mushroom Soup

Vegetable Omelette

Polenta with Cep Mushrooms

Grilled Sea Bass with Fennel

Napoleon Cake

Cheese Cake

As for the fine-dining establishment, it was a terrible disappointment.

The problem with Les Ambassadeurs was that it was all show and no substance.

To use the analogy from tennis, the chef of Les Ambassadeurs, Mr Jean-François Piège, appears to have taken his eye off the ball and, as a direct result, the ball had gone right out of the court.

The job of Mr Jean-François Piège, or any decent chef for that matter, is, simply put: To make appealing, tasty and creative meals, using the best possible raw materials in the production of the dishes.

Even if the food at Les Ambassadeurs had been close to the mark, the service staff of this restaurant let down the entire side.

It appeared that, if any member of the service staff were to have smiled, his/her face might have cracked wide open from the attempt.

Here is just one example: On ordering a bottle of Duval Leroy Champagne at €190, a young man, who posed as a sommelier, asked: *'You know this is a sweet Champagne, do you?'*

TARGET replied: *'Yes. That is the reason that I ordered it.'*

The suggestion of the sommelier, by his surly and insolent mien, was that **TARGET**'s choice of a Champagne was predicated by price, ignorance, and/or stupidity – all of which was utterly resented, aside from the fact that it was totally wrong.

This was the menu that was chosen for the evening meal, the price-tag of which was €402 for 2 people, not including the charge for the Champagne, of course:

Cepes de châtaigner
En chaud/noix fraîches/ciboule

En froid en sushi huile de noix

Œuf coque <<sans coque>>/girolles/amandes/écrevisses

Turbot sauvage

Les dos, Légumes/condiment d'un couscous

Le ventre en semoule/chips au bouillon

Pigeonneau déssosé/foie gras de canard/jus à l'olive

<<Sur mesure>> dégustation de trios mets en demi/fromages/dessert

Fromages affinés pour nous

Comme un vacherin, rhubarb/fraises des bois

Variation des grands desserts à la Française

Riz au lait

Œuf à la neige

Crème caramel au beurre demi-sel

Porfiterole chocolat/vanille

The presentation of all of the dishes was excellent, but the flavours of the food were nothing exceptional.

There are only 3 real ingredients to good food: Appearance; smell; and, taste.

At Les Ambassadeurs, only the first factor was given any real consideration.

On leaving this fine-dining establishment, one was left with the question as to the reason that one had to suffer the arrogance and pomposity of the serving staff – at €592 a pop.

This medium took on one of the serving staff for not being polite and friendly and the answer came back that that was his way of serving guests; and, he enjoyed his work.

Good luck to him!

In fact, **TARGET** would go as far as to state that the food and service at Les Ambassadeurs was not as good as the cheapest meal that this medium experienced throughout its fortnight's stay in Italy, and that included eating at that little, stand-alone restaurant, which catered, mainly, for Italian workers.

Getting away from the subject of the food at Hôtel de Crillon and looking only at the accommodation, one cannot fault the size of **TARGET**'s room, but one can criticise the housekeeping service.

It was noted that some of the shower caps had been recycled (the shower caps were wet when the cardboard boxes were opened); a bottle of drinking water, which was supposed to have been placed on the bedside table, was often forgotten; it took 3 days to clear away some remnants of fruit which had been eaten and the fruit basket was only changed on one occasion, in any event; the slippers were not changed for the entire week's stay; and, glasses, that had been used for drinking, were never cleaned or removed at all.

When these and other discrepancies were reported to the guest-relations, staff members, it made no difference, at all.

'Oh! Sorry for that!' **TARGET** was told, nonchalantly.

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