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CRUISE EXPERIENCES

'GASTRONOMY OF THE SEINE' ON BOARD MS JANE AUSTEN

There are river cruises that show you France, and river cruises that feed you France. Riviera Travel's MS Jane Austen manages both with disarming grace.

Its itinerary, beautifully titled "Gastronomy of the Seine," begins in Paris, but it is Normandy that ultimately claims the voyage, revealing itself not only as a destination but as the source of the flavors, traditions, and quiet pleasures that define this cruise.

The Seine has long been France's most poetic river, yet on this journey it becomes something more intimate: a guide, a pantry, a thread linking each day's culinary experience to the next. The Jane Austen, with her English-country-house charm, feels perfectly cast for the role.

A Floating English Country House with Floral Flair

Riviera Travel knows that a river ship should feel like both a retreat and a prelude to discovery. The Jane Austen embodies this beautifully. Her décor leans toward the quiet elegance of an English country house, a look that pairs harmoniously with the openness demanded by river views. This season, lush floral

arrangements sweep through the lounges and corridors — lilies, roses, hydrangeas — creating an inviting sense of an indoor garden gently blooming its way from bow to stern.

The dining room's miniature orchids, placed with care at every table, give dinners a refined intimacy. Cabins offer the same composure: soft-toned, spacious for a European river vessel, and framed by French balconies that invite morning light and the gentle murmur of the river.

A Paris Evening to Remember

After dinner on the first night, the Jane Austen slips downstream through the heart of Paris — not to depart, but to celebrate it. The Eiffel Tower explodes into its nightly light show as the ship glides toward it, a spectacle so theatrical it feels arranged for this voyage alone. Moments later, the Parisian Statue of Liberty rises into view, poised confidently on her small island midstream,



glowing beneath the city's lights. The ship returns to her berth for the night, and by dawn, everything has transformed. You wake to the gentle greens and orchard-studded pastures of Normandy. Here, in this softer landscape, the Jane Austen feels entirely herself — an English country house perfectly, and almost poetically, at home.

The Stern Bistro: A Buffet with a Wink — and a Whiff of Gauloises

At the stern of the ship, the Bistro serves as Riviera Travel's casual dining venue, though it quickly becomes more beloved for its atmosphere than its menu. Clean-lined and contemporary, with large windows and ever-faithful self-serve coffee machines, it is a haven for early risers, readers, and anyone seeking a quiet enclave to work or simply gaze at the shifting Norman countryside. I admit it became my unofficial office — a perch with a view no coworking space could rival.

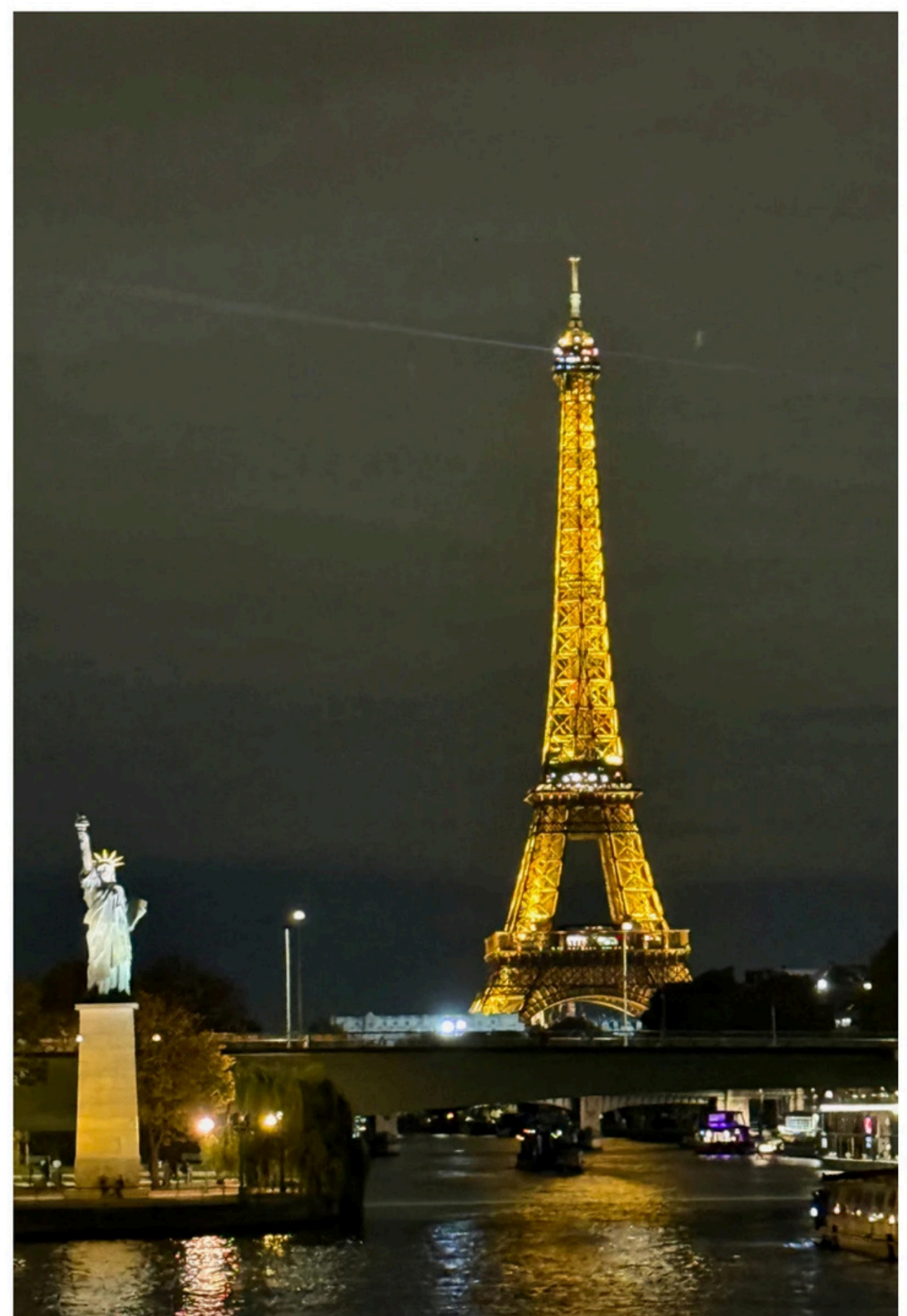
The Bistro also leads to the small smoking deck, a delightful touch of cinematic Paris tucked into the Norman air. There's a whisper of Gauloises here, a hint of Truffaut, a cluster of guests chatting against the soft rush of the river. Culinarily, the Bistro's buffet reflects the absence of a kitchen. Cheeses, cold cuts, and the occasional warm dish appear dutifully. It is not where you go to be dazzled — that role belongs firmly to the main dining room — but it remains

Photo

On the previous page: MS Jane Austen and signature rose bud containers.

Above: Les Ondalys Castle from the Seine.

On the right: Eiffel Tower in Paris.



a charming, unhurried corner of the ship. Its purpose is mood, not magic, and in that it succeeds.

Normandy: The Culinary Heartbeat of the Cruise

Once upstream, Normandy reveals why this itinerary is called "Gastronomy of the Seine." Here, cuisine is not simply tradition; it is inheritance. Orchards glow with apples, pastures hold the region's famed cattle, and markets brim with produce that feels lifted straight from a still-life painting.

Dinner aboard the Jane Austen evolves into a tribute to Norman flavors. Cream appears as Normandy intends — velvety and unapologetically rich. Butter offers a depth that borders on profound. Apples step into their rightful starring role, showing up in tarts, compotes, and sauces with effortless authority. The ship's kitchen leans into this identity. One night brings scallops lightly caramelized and resting on a bright, clean purée. Another features cod poached just to trembling — seafood speaking in Normandy's own quiet, confident voice.

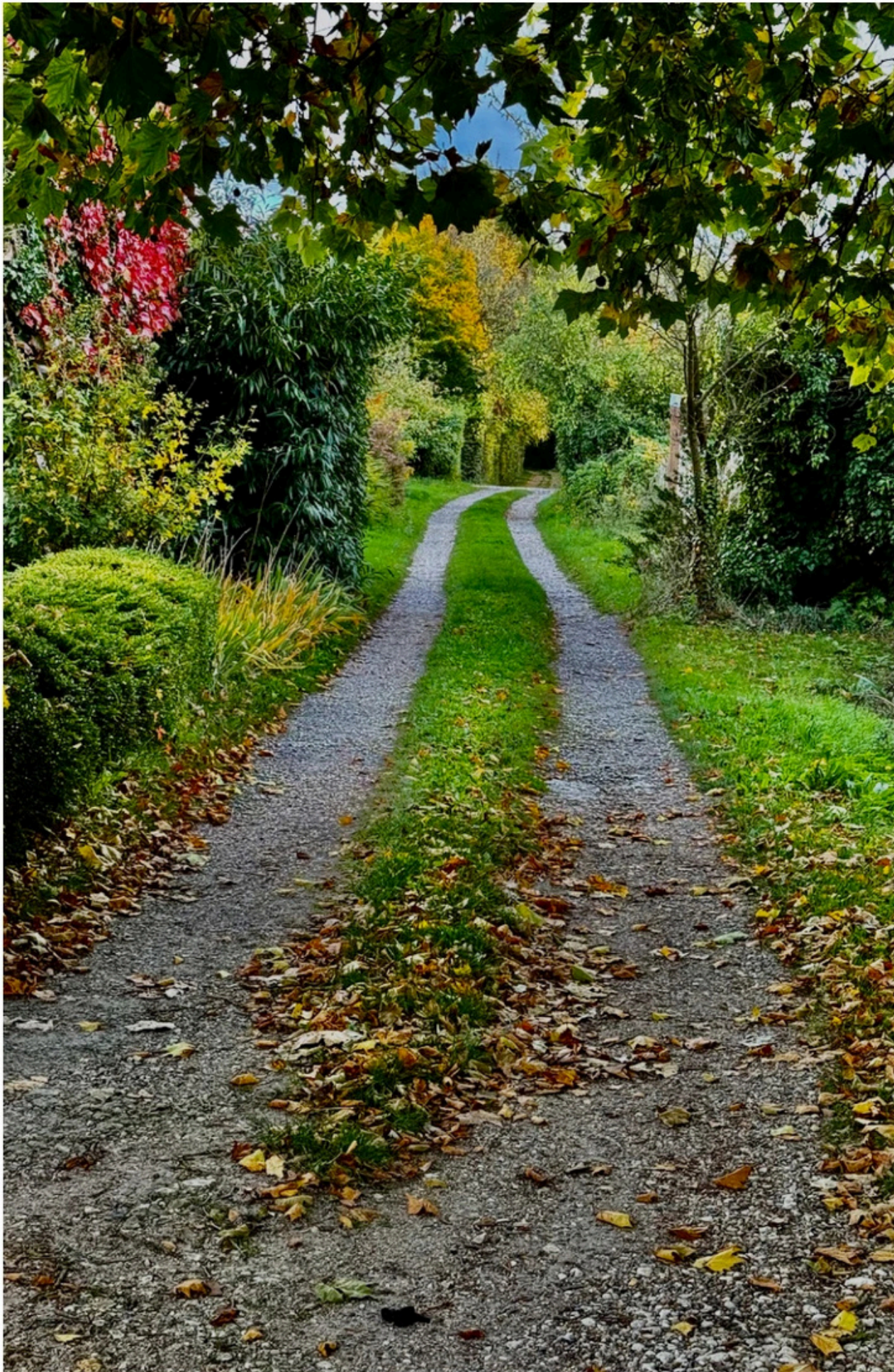
Honfleur and the Call of the Sea

Honfleur, with its painterly harbor and moody skies, gives the voyage its maritime heartbeat. Fishing boats deliver the day's catch — gleaming langoustines, scallops, and cod — and by evening the Jane Austen's kitchen has transformed them into dishes that make their origins unmistakably clear. These meals are not elaborate. They're honest, deeply regional, and perfectly timed to the tides.

Rouen & Les Andelys: The Markets of Memory

Rouen introduces travelers to Normandy's agricultural pulse.





Its markets brim with cheeses wrapped in paper, lettuces still glistening from the field, and apples stacked in pyramids that would tempt Cézanne’s brush. The city’s history and its cuisine exist side by side, each enriching the other.

Les Andelys offers softer pleasures —A cider maker who pours elixirs that taste of autumn year-round, Calvados estates where barrels seem to breathe in the cool air, and orchards whose quiet beauty lingers long after the visit ends. These excursions are not diversions. They are the foundation of what appears on the plate each night aboard the ship.

Evenings Aboard: A River in Repose

Nights on the Jane Austen carry a gentle rhythm. Cocktails in the lounge, soft music, conversation rising and falling like the river itself. Through the large windows, the Seine becomes a companion, slipping past with the kind of understated drama only a river can deliver. Riviera Travel handles this part with elegance: nothing forced, everything quietly in tune with the moment.

A Slow, Savored France

What distinguishes Riviera Travel’s “Gastronomy of the Seine” is its fidelity to place. This is not a cruise that tries to encompass all of French cuisine. Instead, it invites guests to savor one region in depth, letting Normandy’s apples, cream, butter, seafood, and markets tell the story.

By the time the Jane Austen returns to Paris, the voyage feels not simply complete but lived. This is France as it should be experienced: slowly, thoughtfully, and deliciously. And that, in the end, is the true mark of a gastronomic cruise.

Photo

On the previous page: Entrance Lobby Jane Austen and Apple Cider Manor House.

Above: Dinner on board.

On the left: Country lane Normandy; Honfeur boat.



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