# TRAVELER OF THE QUARTER



Normandy American Cemetary, Normandy

# DONNA GUSTAFSON

Traveling with Women of the Midwest

*By: Donna Gustafson*

Hi, Women of the Midwest!

I was excited when Women of the Midwest offered a trip to France. I eagerly looked at the itinerary and saw two places I had long wanted to visit—Monet's flower gardens at Giverny and the Normandy beaches.

I have long admired Monet's paintings, and I wanted to see the gardens that inspired his art. Normandy held a different kind of meaning for me. I wanted to stand on those beaches and pay my respects to the men who fought and died to free people they had never met from Nazi tyranny.

France's countryside is beautiful. We drove past fields, pastures, and charming villages on our way to magnificent châteaux and cathedrals. Inside the châteaux, centuries-old furniture, paintings, and tapestries brought history to life. It was amazing to think that we were walking across the same floors where royalty had walked hundreds of years before us.

As beautiful as the châteaux were, none prepared me for the grandeur of the Palace of Versailles. Walking through the gilded gates glittering in the sunlight and seeing the magnificent palace for the first time was jaw-dropping. I was finally seeing the place I had read about in history books. Walking through its opulent rooms and expansive gardens made the history I had read about seem almost real.

And then there was Paris. The city is so much more than haute couture and fine cuisine. It's the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame, the Louvre, sidewalk cafés, and flea markets filled with unusual finds.

This trip opened my eyes to the many sides of France. Before our journey, I thought of France mostly in terms of fine food and wine, high fashion, art, and the tragedies of World War II. I discovered a warm and welcoming country filled with a fascinating history and remarkable architecture.

I left France with a much deeper appreciation for the country—and with memories of places I had dreamed of seeing for years. Monet's gardens, the beaches of Normandy, the grandeur of Versailles, and the energy of Paris each gave me something different.

With gratitude,
Donna Gustafson

P.S. A little note from Women of the Midwest: Donna has traveled with us on an incredible 18 journeys, placing her among our top three travelers for the most journeys taken with Women of the Midwest. We are so grateful for her loyalty, friendship, and adventurous spirit.



A Journey Worth Capturing!



Good Time Had By All!



Cheers to the Champagne Cellars!



At the Gate of Sun King's Palace