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The Patrouille de France travels the U.S. to commemorate WWI alliance

Dear Friends,

The days are getting longer and summer is on its way. France is the number one tourist destination in the world, and we always look forward to welcoming visitors, but this time of year is my favorite.

This spring, we have focused on honoring one of the most significant events of the French-American alliance, the centennial anniversary of the United States’ entry into World War I in 1917.

The Patrouille de France, the aerobatic demonstration contingent of the French Air Force, took part in the celebrations and toured the United States. With a total of 17 shows around the country, the Patrouille has honored numerous American sites, flying over the Kansas City National World War I Museum on April 6 — the 100th anniversary of American entry into the war — and other symbolic locations, including the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Grand Canyon. This was the Patrouille’s first official tour of the US in 31 years, so witnessing it during my tenure here has been a great pleasure.

French love spending time outside. Whether it be at a picnic by the river, exploring the Alps, or dining on a restaurant’s terrace, there is no better time to be in France than the long and warm days of May and June.

In May, France holds some of its most important international events of the year: the Cannes Film Festival on the Côte d’Azur starting May 17 and the French Open in Paris starting May 22. We look forward to inviting the top stars from both the tennis and film worlds, as well as the tourists that these events attract each year.

The Cannes Festival is celebrating its 70th anniversary in 2017. The festival is truly international, featuring films of all genres from around the world, including 29 different countries this year.

Tennis, meanwhile, is one of France’s oldest sporting traditions. The French Open began in 1891 and today is one of tennis’s four “Grand Slam” events — the sport’s most prestigious events of the year.

In 2016, players represented 68 different countries and a similar number is expected this year. The tournament is colloquially known as “Roland Garros” in honor of the World War I pilot for whom the tournament’s grounds are named.

Film and tennis are two great French traditions, and these events are two of the oldest in the world; we hope you will enjoy them with us this year.
The Fourth Annual Lafayette Debates

North American Championship took place from April 8 to 9 in Washington, D.C. The intercollegiate debate competition seeks to promote international civil society and enduring relations between the United States and France by engaging tomorrow’s leaders on the opportunities and challenges facing our rapidly globalizing world. The event was organized by the Higher Education Department of the Embassy of France in the United States in partnership with the George Washington University.

The origins of the Lafayette Debates date to the early days of the French-American friendship. In 1824, General Lafayette and his son George Washington Lafayette came to the United States on a hero’s tour to celebrate the role of France in the American Revolutionary War. They were received by the debate society of Columbian College (which later became the George Washington University), where the younger Lafayette took part in a debate with society members. In 2013, the university and the Embassy of France began the Lafayette Debates in their honor and in the spirit of transatlantic dialogue.

During this year’s debate, teams were asked to argue in favor of or against the following statement: “Democracies should prioritize interculturalism.” Interculturalism in the context of the debate refers specifically to the Council of Europe’s “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue,” which argues that “an intercultural approach offers a forward-looking model for managing cultural diversity distinct from and superior to past models of assimilation and multiculturalism.”

After intense competition, the judges decided in favor of the Morehouse College debate team, composed of Keith Matier and Jonathan Carlisle. Matier and Carlisle, along with three other debaters from the University of Pennsylvania, Vanderbilt University, and The George Washington University, also won a place on the 2017 Young Ambassadors Study Tour. They will be able to continue their study of the debate topic firsthand under the tutelage of French experts in the field, with a fully funded trip to Paris.

T.J. Kilcullen and Seamus Matlack from the United States Military Academy (USMA) won the General Lafayette Debates Championship, a separate military academy debate tournament for the USMA, the French Ecole de Guerre, and the United States Naval Academy.

The 2016-17 Lafayette Debates began fall 2016 with an opening round at the University of Toronto and continued with the Earlybird Contest at the U.S. Universities Eastern Debating Championship in February before concluding this month. Over 450 American, Canadian, and French students representing over 60 different colleges and universities participated in the debates, continuing a longstanding tradition of intellectual exchange between France and the United States.

Grande Fête de la Francophonie

ON MARCH 31, the month-long D.C. Francophonie Festival ended with the Grande Fête de la Francophonie at the Embassy’s Maison Française in Washington, D.C. The annual festival is a celebration of French-speaking communities from around the world, who gather to honor their shared francophone heritage.

Over 34 embassies set up exhibition booths to share their cuisine, art, history, and more. From an authentic tea service at Morocco’s booth to beer tasting at Canada’s, attendees could travel around the French-speaking world in one night.

In some of the countries represented, like Haiti and Switzerland, French is an official language, while in others, like Mauritania and Egypt, there are significant French-speaking populations. Other countries like Slovenia and Romania came to show their strong friendship and shared history with France.

For the third year in a row, the event was completely sold out. As guests navigated the packed stands, they enjoyed multicultural music. French-Cameroonian musician Francis Jocky electrified the crowds for two hours with his blend of jazz, soul, funk, and rhythm and blues. DJ Princess Slaya began and ended the night with dance tunes that synthesized rhythms from Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe.

The event was presented by the Embassy of France in collaboration with Francophonie D.C., Smithsonian at 8 and the Alliance Française of Washington, D.C. The Smithsonian has been working with Francophonie D.C. for over 14 years. “Each year, the Fête has its own flavor based on the countries participating and the musical artist featured,” said Brigitte Blachere, Smithsonian Associates program manager for the event. “It’s very hard to compare. They are all wonderful!”

Guests enjoy tea and a photo opportunity at Morocco’s booth at the Grande Fête de la Francophonie.
Interview: Brice Kapel

Brice Kapel is a children’s performer who was born in Togo, where he developed a love for singing in church. He moved with his family to France at the age of eight. Having studied music in the United States, he is fluent in English, French, and his native Togolese language, Mina, and sings in all three. He has released two full albums “Coloricocola” in 2000 and “Porto Seguro” in 2014, as well as several smaller live albums.

Who are your main musical influences?
I’m actually inspired by many musicians who perform in English, especially pop bands such as Genesis, Pink Floyd and Archives. I enjoy many other different genres though, including classical and contemporary to name a few. Some of my other influences include Bartok, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart.

But I also want to hold on to my roots, because when you cut a tree’s roots, it dies. I seek to incorporate my African roots into my music, so my music is really a mix between world music and these other influences.

Can you tell us about your audience, especially the children?
I begin with the idea that everyone in the audience should enjoy the performance, regardless of their age. Often, people tell me that the kids they want to bring are of different ages — some are 4 or 5 and others are 12. They assume that my show isn’t suited to different ages, but to me, age is irrelevant. If the youngest child in the audience can do a certain movement, so can the oldest.

It is also important to spend time together. Though you may not know the person sitting next to you, by the end of the show maybe you’ll have something to talk about, and maybe you’ll even exchange phone numbers or visit each other. We like to create a bond between audience members.

Because much of your audience is so young, do you feel a responsibility to convey certain themes?
Yes, without a doubt. I’ll give you a song as an example, called “Avions de papier” (Paper airplanes), which is about divorce.

Three weeks after giving a performance in Lausanne, I received a phone call from a Swiss doctor, saying he was child psychologist who worked with a 10-year-old girl who was at the show. She told him that after seeing my performance, she understood why her parents separated and, shortly after, it was decided that she no longer needed treatment. The doctor wanted to know why, or how, she could have understood this from just a song!

At the end of the song, I mention that sometimes mothers and fathers get angry with each other and cannot live together anymore. However, I tell my audience, they should always know that the love their parents have for them is the strongest kind of love that exists.

These words, combined with the tremendous work that the doctor had accomplished with that young girl, helped her overcome her parents’ divorce. She realized it was not her fault! Something clicked in this 10-year-old girl’s mind.

Is it important to you to tell stories?
Yes, telling stories allows me to go back to when I lived in Africa. It evokes for me the oral tradition, where people would share stories from generation to generation. In parts of Africa we call those storytellers “living libraries,” and orality is very important.

Today, I find that people don’t tell their children stories as much anymore. Sometimes when I do shows for really little kids, I can tell right away which ones get told stories regularly and which ones don’t, because the kids that don’t are afraid — when they see me coming, they just see a black man with a shaved head!

Telling children stories is important. Stories are a moment right before bedtime when parents can really be present with their children. Even in hospitals, people often tell stories to very sick kids and to old people who are near the end of their lives to give them comfort. They can talk to each other — it’s intimate and there’s a lot of tenderness.

Do you like interacting with audiences after concerts?
Yes, very much. There was this little boy who came up to me right after the concert, and asked about a song about a girl named Ina who couldn’t swim. He asked, “why couldn’t Ina swim?” and I said, “because there are no swimming lessons in Africa.”

Through this story, I wanted to show kids that they are lucky to have the means to learn how to swim, because that isn’t the case in Africa. This is how you change modalities, how you explain to people that in travelling you learn different things, and so you can grow. Education, teaching, sharing — all that makes it possible to change this world that is so flawed, but so beautiful.

En chiffres...

+6% The increase in French voter turnout in overseas territories in the first round of the 2017 election compared to the first round in 2012.

∞ the number of films in competition at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.

18,000 approximate number of miles the French rail network covers.
The Patrouille de France jets across the United States

**THE PATROUILLE DE FRANCE (PAF)**, France’s aerobatic jet team, traveled to North America for its 2017 U.S. and Canada tour from March 19 to May 4. The PAF last performed in the United States 31 years ago to celebrate the centenary of the Statue of Liberty. They developed this tour to reaffirm the historic ties and enduring friendship between France and the United States and to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the United States’ entry into World War I in 1917.

**American and French Air Cooperation**

During World War 1, the United States joined the Allies that included Britain, France, Russia, and Italy to combat the Central Powers, including Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. They provided France with funding, food, and ammunition and sent over a million combat troops to the south of the main French lines.

French-American air force cooperation dates back to this period, when American pilots in the Lafayette squadron flew in the battles of Verdun and Somme. Now the U.S. Air Force supports French missions in the Middle East as well as in regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Both American and French pilots fly in NATO operations and take part in the anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and Syria.

**What is the Patrouille de France?**

The name Patrouille de France means Patrol of France, but is short for the team’s official name, the Patrouille Acrobatique de France. The Patrouille de France represents all French Air Force crews and has become the symbol of the country’s Air Force. The PAF is equivalent to the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and the Air Force Thunderbirds demonstration squadrons. In order to maintain a strong relationship between the people and the Air Force, the PAF performs aerial demonstrations for the public to enjoy and to showcase their talents in France and abroad.

**History of the Patrouille de France**

France’s first aerobatic demonstration, performed by the Patrouille d’Étampes, took place over Étampes-Mondésir, a commune in the metropolitan area of Paris, France in 1931. Under the command of Captain Pierre-Fleurquin, the team was well received by the public and was chosen to represent France at international events from 1932 to 1939. In 1937, the team adopted the name Patrouille de l’École de l’air (Flying School Patrol).

The name Patrouille de France was adopted in 1953. At an aerial event in Algeria, the show’s commentator, amazed by the performance he had just witnessed, called the team Patrouille de France. The Defense Ministry liked the name and decided to create a national Patrouille de l’École de l’air.

This first team was made up of six Fouga Magister aircraft stationed in Salon-de-Provence and was France’s premier aerial display team from 1964-1981. Following the team’s 16 years of aviation, it was replaced by eight Alpha Jet aircraft in 1981, which are the aircraft model still used to this day.

Since 1953, the Patrouille de France has performed in more than 30 countries, including tours in Asia in 2004 and South America and the West Indies in 2009. In 2009, Virginie Guyot became the first female Commandant of the Patrouille, and the first woman in history to lead a demonstration team.

In 2012, a film reflecting on the PAF’s history for the team’s 60th anniversary was produced by Airborne films. It commemorates “La Grande Dame” (the great lady, another name for the PAF) and its work carrying on the traditions of aviation pioneers and fulfilling its mission to protect and serve citizens.
The 2017 airshow theme was “Heritage to Horizon: Legacy of the Great War – A Century of Airpower.” The tails of the jets were painted red, white, and blue with white stars for the special tour.

SUCCESS IN NUMBERS
Seventy airmen, pilots, mechanics, support staff, 10 Alphajet, 1 Airbus A400M Atlas and 25 tons of equipment were involved to make the tour a success. The team flew Dassault/Dornier Alpha Jets; because they only have 1,800 miles of range on one tank, the jets had to make four stops to refuel in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Greenland, and Canada.

PLACES VISITED
The tour began in Bagotville, Canada, on March 19 and made its way to the U.S. on March 25 with a flyover of the Statue of Liberty in New York. It also made flyovers of eight other symbolic landmarks including the Grand Canyon, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

HIGHLIGHTS
The tour included a reception with the French ambassador, Gérard Araud, at the Embassy of France in Washington, D.C., on March 27, a visit to the Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama to pay tribute to those injured in France during WWI from April 7 to 9 and participation in the NATO festival in Norfolk, Virginia from April 28 to 29. The U.S. Navy Blue Angels joined the PAF in their demonstrations in Pensacola, Florida, from April 10 to 12, while the U.S. Army Air Force Thunderbirds joined them in their demonstrations at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada from April 17 to 18.

THE OFFICIAL CEREMONY
The centennial of the American entry into WW1 was held in Kansas City on April 6 at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, organized by the US World War I Centennial Commission. Readings from American writings detailing the United States’ decision to enter the war were read.

In addition, military bands performed and the U.S. aircraft and the PAF performed flyovers. Among the invitees who attended were acting Secretary of the U.S. Army Robert M. Speer, ambassadors from France, Italy, Hungary, and other European countries, and descendants of notable World War I leaders and soldiers including the granddaughters of General George S. Patton and President Dwight D. Eisenhower.
France’s eco-friendly architecture movement

IN FRANCE, SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE is on the rise with the recent construction of the eco-friendly PEN.DU house by BRUT Architectes in Brittany.

Built with a budget of $180,000, PEN.DU was made to resemble a greenhouse with its translucent panels, wooden frame, and pitched roof.

The house is green in more than name; its design emphasizes passive solar heat gain and energy efficiency. It is insulated with straw bales, while large south-facing windows maximize solar gain in the winter. On the northern side of the house, openings provide ventilation for the bathrooms.

Every part of the house has an environmentally friendly purpose. The roof is designed to collect rainwater, which can then be cleaned, stored, and reused. An attached workshop on the western end of the house protects it from wind damage. Built entirely out of bio-sourced materials to reduce its carbon footprint, PEN.DU is also elevated above the ground, which further minimizes its impact on its surroundings.

While PEN.DU is innovative, it is part of a tradition of sustainable housing in France. One of the most important of these architectural trends is the passive house, which originated in Germany in the 1990s. To be certified as a passive house, a building must commit to maximum energy efficiency, requiring little to no energy for heating or cooling.

France’s first passive house appeared in Bessancourt in 2010. Unlike PEN.DU, that home, built by the architecture firm Karawitz, looks like a traditional rural farmhouse. However, it shares many of the same features, including south-facing windows for heat and light, a tilted roof, and an eco-friendly ventilation system.

In 2014, French architectural firm Multipod Studio unveiled its take on sustainable housing. Their Pop-Up House meets all the passive house requirements and requires almost no additional heating, and it takes only four days to assemble. Thanks to its Lego-like design, it can be constructed by anyone with an electric screwdriver and is cheaper than a traditional passive house.

Firms like Karawitz, BRUT, and Multipod Studio continue to build eco-friendly housing, but the movement also has support on a national level. A 2015 law decreed that the rooftops of all new commercial buildings in France must be partially covered in plants or solar panels. Green roofs have been shown to increase energy efficiency by regulating temperature, and solar panels generate clean electricity.

With increased awareness of the importance of protecting the environment, France’s continued push for sustainable architecture shows a commitment to a greener future.

New biogas plant in Northern France

FRANCE MAKES AN IMPORTANT step toward a more sustainable future with plans to build a new biogas plant in Sourdun in northern France.

Biogas is a mixture of gases, primarily methane and carbon dioxide, that is produced when organic materials break down in the absence of oxygen. Because this process generates no net carbon dioxide, it has a very low carbon footprint. This, combined with the ubiquitousness of organic materials, makes biogas a very good renewable energy source that is 30 percent cheaper than other forms of renewable energy.

Once properly processed and concentrated, biogas can be used just like fossil fuels. Raw biogas from the new plant will be refined and will thus be able to feed directly into Sourdun’s local energy network, producing 25 million kilowatt hours of biomethane and supplying 1,500 households a year with heating. In time, that output is expected to double.

The organic material required to make biogas can come from anything from manure and sewage to agricultural waste. Manure is a particularly important resource because of its high amount of methane, which, if released into the atmosphere, contributes 20 times more to global warming than carbon dioxide.

As the biggest agricultural producer in the European Union, France has enormous potential as a source of biogas. Currently, 90 percent of the ingredients for biogas production in France come from agricultural sources.

The manure produced by farm animals, like these cows in the Auvergne region of France, is an important resource used to make biogas.

Other sources include water treatment plant, household, and food wastes. France has begun to take advantage of its agricultural resources with more than 230 active biogas plants and plans to build 500 more by 2020.

If this trend continues, French scientists predict that France could reach full energy independence within 35 years.
New polar museum imitates the artics

THE WORLD’S FIRST POLAR MUSEUM dedicated to both the Arctic and the Antarctic opened in Prémanon, France. The Espace des Mondes Polaires Paul-Emile Victor aims to increase public awareness of the importance of our polar ecosystems, which are being threatened by climate change. The museum was designed to give visitors a taste of what life is like at the poles. The building itself resembles an iceberg, with over 60 percent of the museum’s space underground.

The permanent exhibition is set up thematically, exploring topics such as indigenous peoples, polar ecosystems, and scientific research and discoveries. Displays, artifacts, and films explain why it is so cold at the poles, how humans, animals and plants have adapted to survive at polar temperatures, how global warming is changing the environment of the Arctic and Antarctic, and how these changes will impact the world.

Also on display are items from polar expeditions, including the personal archives of Paul-Emile Victor, a French explorer, geologist, glaciologist, and ethnographer who worked to protect the environment and people of the Arctic and Antarctic.

His son, the late anthropologist Jean-Christophe Victor, founded the museum in his father’s honor along with naturalist Stephane Niveau.

"The idea was to open a place that could serve as a support to teaching about the polar world, while approaching it in a playful way,” Niveau said.

The museum holds regular conferences, guided tours, and children’s workshops, and even has an on-site ice-skating rink.

The Espace des Mondes Polaires is projected to welcome 50,000 to 70,000 visitors a year.


In a series of animated, fictional, and ethnographic films, Alassane parodies colonial attitudes towards black Africans, the corrupt despotism of local officials, and the shallow materialism of Niger’s youth.

Alassane’s films are vital and imaginative records of Nigerien traditions. Mark your calendars for this rare series, taking place from May 12 to 15.

Moustapha Alassane Retrospective
May 12 - 15 at The Museum of Modern Art

For more information, visit: https://www.moma.org/calendar/film/3819?locale=fr.
WIDELY CONSIDERED the toughest hike in Europe, the GR 20, which traverses the island of Corsica, is also arguably the most rewarding. GR stands for grande randonnée, and the 20 comes from an old Corsican postal code. The approximately 112 mile-long trail goes from Calenzana, in the northwest of the island, to Conza in the southwest. Most hikers take the north-south route but it can also be done in reverse.

The trail is split into two primary parts: the northern half, known as 2B (B for Bastia, Northern Corsica’s major city) and the southern half, known as 2A (A for Ajaccio, Southern Corsica’s major city and the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte). The trail does not actually link to either of these cities, as it takes a more scenic mountain route.

Along the trail are 16 gîtes d’étape (mountain refuges), which are roughly evenly spaced out to provide hikers with a place to rest each night. Hikers can either sleep inside the gîtes (reservation required) or carry their own tents and pitch camp outside; food is available for purchase for everyone. The gîtes are open from June to September, which is the recommended season to hike the trail (some remain open in the May and October shoulder seasons).

The trail crosses Corsica’s beautiful, and surprisingly tall, mountains, including Monte Cinco, the highest point in Corsica at approximately 8,900 feet. These peaks provide gorgeous scenery, as well as incredible panoramic views of the island and the Mediterranean Sea straight from the trail. While the GR 20 is challenging, and should be attempted only by hikers in good physical condition who plan for the risks involved, the views along the trail make it an unforgettable experience.