France

EIFFEL TOWER'S GOLDEN WELCOME TO PARIS, WHERE 'TOUR DE LANCE' DRAWS THOUSANDS TO THE STREETS

About France

A primarily Catholic country, the largest minority among France's 60 million people is Muslim. The country shares a border with Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium.

When To Visit

Spring offers the best weather, with beach tourism picking up in May. The Alps and Pyrenees are popular in winter.

Visa Requirements

Nationals of the EU, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand do not need visas to visit France as tourists for up to three months. Except for the citizens of a handful of other European countries, everyone else must have a visa.

Getting There

Paris is a major international airline hub, but many other French cities are also connected by air to European destinations. Rail services link France with every country in Europe, you can also use the ferry from the UK.

Bahrain Connection

Bahrain and France are part of an exclusive club of nations who host Formula-1 Grand Prix.

The Friendship Tour vehicle makes its way into Paris, with the golden Eiffel Tower in the distance.

Travel Tip

To avoid the worst of the crowds, visit the Eiffel Tower after dusk. As a bonus, you'll get a close-up view of the floodlit ironwork.

A H, PARIS! IT HAS AN AURA THAT IS HARD TO describe yet is impossible to miss. It is a world capital of fashion, of romance, of art, of food, of sport, and is blessed with so many well-known attractions that other countries' tourist boards can only look on in envy.

The sense of style is so strong here it can almost be intimidating, yet the city can also be remarkably comfortable and intimate.

We arrived here late in the evening, and were able to catch the Eiffel Tower in all its finery. Lit up at night, the iconic attraction is surely at its most beautiful, and it was a wonderful greeting to this most amazing city.

We were lucky to have our accommodations organised by Yemenia's cultural attache Khadija Al Salami and her husband Charles. They took us out for coffee and offered their help while we were in the

PAGE OPPOSITE: The Eiffel Tower is at its most beautiful by night.

Expedition leader Ali Mushaima with Cocorico Travel Agency owner Catherine Joubert who organises pearl diving trips to Bahrain.

The Friendship Tour team with Khadija Al Salami and her husband Charles after arriving in Paris.

city. We visted both the Bahrain and Yemen embassies in Paris, and helped get the Friendship Tour message out through the local media.

There was more opportunity to spread the word at the Eiffel Tower, which we visited again by day, carrying the Bahrain flag and talking to people who wondered where the flag was from.

Paris, a narrow loser to London in the bid to

host the 2012 Summer Olympics, has an immaculate sporting pedigree (think Formula-1, think French Open tennis).

When we were in Paris, there was another annual staple on, the Tour de France, which of course is the world's best known cycling race.

American star Lance Armstrong, whose domination of the race in recent years after a remarkable battle with cancer has commentators dubbing it the 'Tour

Fast Fact

Greeting shop staff with a 'Bonjour' and saying 'Au revoir' when you leave is considered a common courtesy in France.

de Lance', was in action, and it was just incredible to watch the extent of spectator support both for the rider and the event. They were out in their thousands, lining the Champs Elysses, cheering on their favourites as they whizzed past.

Watching the event on TV, it's sometimes hard to grasp the kind of speeds involved, and seeing it all live and up close can dramatically change one's perspective. These guys really do go *fast*!

While in Paris, we also visited the Cocorico Travel Agency, whose owner Catherine Joubert organises pearl diving trips to Bahrain. Catherine was quite impressed at what we had achieved so far, and recounted the positive experiences of her clientele who had travelled to Bahrain.

Also in Paris, we met Gulf Air's public relations manager Antoine Colombin, who was also delighted at what we doing in our own little way to put Bahrain on the travel map.