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*Dijon, France*  
*Spring 2011*

Dijon!

First thing I will talk about is Dijon: the city and the area itself. Two other Saint Mary's girls and I live about a five minute walk away from Centre Ville, which is the heart of Dijon. On the main road, there is an impressive selection of stores, a cinema, and a park. Clustered around the Centre Ville there are at least six Cathedrals (I've only been in three, but they were all beautiful), a museum of archeology, and the Musée des Beaux-Arts. The Musée des Beaux-Arts is housed in the Palais des Ducs, from where the Dukes of Bourgogne ruled the region. They amassed a lot of the collection, and there are really interesting pieces, especially from the middle ages and the renaissance.

I love the little side roads in Centre Ville, especially the ones around Notre Dame. There are lots of really cute stores selling antiques, little gift shops, and of course lots of patisseries and boulangeries selling fresh bread, croissants, pastries, and cakes.

Dijon is best known for the mustard that bears its name, and there is certainly a lot of it here. Our host family uses it in all the salad dressings. Many shops sell an astonishingly wide variety, flavored with anything and everything: basil, cognac, citrus fruits, or hazelnuts. I'm not quite that adventurous, but before I leave I hope to go to the Musée de Moutarde (Museum of Mustard).

After that, Dijon is known for Cassis and the wine from the Bourgogne region. Cassis is a liqueur made from black currants, and it is commonly mixed with white wine to make a drink called Kir. There is a free class every other Thursday for foreign students to learn about French wine. All I knew about wine (or thought I did) was that there are predominately two kinds, white wine and red wine (wrong), and that the Bourgogne makes red wine (WRONG!). It turns out that there are more types of wine than I could ever keep track of because you have to take the climate, region, village, and type of grape into account. Also, there are only a few places in Bourgogne that produce red wine, and the rest is predominately white wine. The professor explained that Bourgogne in English translates to Burgundy and because Burgundy is also a color, most Americans mistakenly believe that red wine comes from the region, when it probably comes from Bordeaux (and she made it very clear that Bourgogne's wines are better).

The Dijonais seem very proud of their town, as well as the Bourgogne. I've had one professor ask us to explain why the people in Dijon are nicer than the Parisians. I've been told several times that Bourgogne is superior in every way to the Bordeaux region. Our planned trips end when our professor Stephan tells us that we are now returning to the center of civilization, Dijon.

My favorite quirky thing about Dijon is probably the chouette. The chouette (owl) was carved into the side of Notre Dame in the 15th century, and tradition has it that if you rub the owl with your left hand, it will bring you good luck. Dispensing all that luck has taken a toll on the owl, but after some restoration "la chouette" is still there, even after 600 years. Lots of the gift shops sell chouette themed objects. I already have chouette shaped salt and pepper shakers, but I know that they are the first of several chouette themed souvenirs. Does the chouette actually bring good luck though? I think I will wait until the end of the semester before I try to answer that question!