On the Road Again: *Travels With Jefferson*

As we look forward to a time when widespread travel can safely resume, we consider Jefferson’s far-ranging journeys. Thomas Jefferson spent most of his life in his home state of Virginia, but he traveled extensively throughout both the United States and Europe. Not only did his voyages play an important role in shaping his interests and expanding his horizons, but he also often made a lasting impression on the places he visited. While he relished seeing the world, his heart was never far from his beloved mountaintop home, writing, “All my wishes end, where I hope my days will end, at Monticello.”

**Philadelphia**

Jefferson first visited Philadelphia in 1766 to be inoculated against smallpox. The financial and cultural center of colonial America and of the early American republic, Philadelphia was the location for the Continental Congress and served as the national capital from 1790 until 1800, when the federal government was moved to Washington, D.C. As a member of Congress, Jefferson was frequently in Philadelphia. On one of those trips, while staying at the Graff House on Market Street in May of 1776, he wrote the Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson lived in Philadelphia during the years 1790-1794, when he was secretary of state, and in 1797-1800, when he was vice president.

**New York City**

Jefferson’s first journey to New York City in May 1766 was a difficult one. He wrote that on the way there, his horse ran away twice and he almost drowned while fording a river. His next trip to New York City — when he was a 47-year-old international celebrity and secretary of state — went considerably better. Although Jefferson spent less than six months in residence during this 1790 visit, he organized the first patent office, coordinated diplomatic affairs with Europe, and worked out a compromise with James Madison and Alexander Hamilton on a federal assumption of state debts in return for locating the permanent site of the capital on the Potomac River.

In November 1800, Vice President Jefferson joined President John Adams as two of the first federal officials to live in Washington. The following year, on March 4, 1801, Jefferson became the first president inaugurated in the new capital city.
Thomas Jefferson lived in Paris from August 1784 to September 1789. According to Lucia “Cinder” Stanton and Douglas Wilson in their book *Jefferson Abroad*, these five years were “arguably the most memorable of his life. Paris — with its music, its architecture, its savants and salons, its learning and enlightenment, not to mention its elegant social life ... had worked its enchantments on this rigidly self-controlled Virginia gentleman, and had stimulated him to say and do and write remarkable things.”

Jefferson had dreamed of visiting Europe since he was a boy, but it wasn’t until the 41-year-old widower received a diplomatic appointment to Paris in 1784 that the dream became a reality. In Paris, Jefferson was introduced to the leading artists of the day. He met Jacques Louis David and posed for Jean-Antoine Houdon for a portrait bust. He attended plays, browsed bookstores and, famously, shopped. Jefferson bought furniture, kitchen utensils, candlesticks, teapots, tablecloths, fabric and many other items. When he arrived back in America, he had 86 packing crates shipped to him from Paris.

During a three-month journey to the south of France in 1787, Jefferson took a break from city life in Paris to explore many of the topics that fascinated him. Traveling anonymously as a private citizen rather than a diplomat, he wrote, “I was alone thro the whole, and think one travels more usefully when they travel alone, because they reflect more.” In Champagne, Burgundy, Beaujolais and Bordeaux, Jefferson compared red and white wines and the soils in which they were cultivated, and wrote in depth about the planting and pruning of the vines. “Architecture, painting, sculpture, antiquities, agriculture, the condition of the labouring poor fill all my moments,” Jefferson wrote during his European excursion.