Contributing Editor Milton P., Boston MA: In our roaming through the various European destinations we've visited since retirement, we've become fascinated by cathedrals. Their Gothic splendor symbolizes people's dedication to religious beliefs and human progress.

We've spent enjoyable and educational hours visiting cathedrals, including the Basilica di San Marco in Venice, Cologne Cathedral in Germany, Notre Dame in Paris and St. Paul's in London. On our most recent journey to Paris, we decided to travel 56 miles southwest to the French town of Chartres and see another historic cathedral. Formally known as Our Lady of Chartres, this imposing cathedral was built in 1200, and continues to hold services today. Admission to most of the cathedral interiors and grounds is free. However, we decided to explore the cloistered sections and the lofty towers. We saw beautiful views of the town and surrounding countryside. The charge was about $10.   Artwork, religious icons and sculptures, as well as the magnificent stained glass windows, fascinated us. As we walked below, bathed in daylight filtered through the windows, we marveled at the soaring Gothic arches, choir loft, nave and realistic sculptures of long-ago religious figures.

Since the Middle Ages, the cathedral has been in use and kept in good condition, except for some damage due to a nearby battle during the 18th Century French Revolution. During both World Wars in the 20th Century, local workers removed the windows and other fragile artifacts and stored them in crypts below. Fortunately, all of the cathedral's precious history has survived intact.

We took the scenic 65-minute TER train ride from the Paris Gare Montparnasse station. The cost is about $50 second class and $75 first class. The cathedral is just a ten-minute walk from the Gare de Chartres through the pleasant Medieval town of 40,000 inhabitants. From April through September, from 10 p.m. until 1 a.m., the cathedral and other historic buildings nightly become a giant light and sound theater. Of course, there are special events every Christmas season.