

# Paris

## Overview

### Introduction

Paris, "The City of Light," has been written about, filmed and photographed countless times. Although it seems as if we all know Paris even before we see it, nothing compares to actually being there. Going to the top of the Eiffel Tower, walking along the Seine at dusk or sipping coffee at an elegant sidewalk cafe are uniquely Parisian experiences—and the wonder of it is that real life takes on an aura of magical make-believe, so that it seems just like being in the movies.

Whether you're in Paris for work or for fun, do as the Parisians do and enjoy yourself in this romantic city, which offers something special for everyone. For the art lover, the Musee d'Orsay and the Louvre offer priceless collections, while the designer shops and chic boutiques of the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore, Boulevard Saint-Germain and Avenue Montaigne tempt the serious shopper.

And for anyone who enjoys good food, Paris' restaurants, from inexpensive neighborhood bistros to the most refined and elegant gourmet establishments, will provide delightful meals.

### Highlights

**Sights**—Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral; the Eiffel Tower; the Arc de Triomphe; Sacre Coeur; a cruise on the Seine on one of the *bateaux mouches*.

**Museums**—The art treasures of the Louvre; the famous impressionist paintings at the Musee d'Orsay and the Musee de l'Orangerie; the modern art of the Centre Pompidou; the timeless sculptures at the Musee Rodin; Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles, just outside Paris.

**Memorable Meals**—Dinner at Restaurant Alain Ducasse at Plaza Athenee; the magnificent frescoes, marble halls and superb cuisine at Les Ambassadeurs; dining at a small neighborhood restaurant such as Le Pamphlet; the kosher falafel joints of Rue des Rosiers; after-dinner coffee on the terrace of Cafe de Flore.

**Late Night**—A hip jazz club; the bars and restaurants along Cour St. Emilion at Bercy Village; the bars and cafes on Rue de Lappe or Rue Oberkampf.

**Walks**—From the Arc de Triomphe down the Champs Elysees, through the Tuileries Gardens to the Louvre; from Notre-Dame through the Latin Quarter to the Pantheon and through the Jardins du Luxembourg; along the Seine, crossing the Ile de la Cite or the Ile St. Louis; a midnight stroll along the romantic streets of Montmartre; along the Canal St. Martin at dusk, often referred to as one of Paris' most romantic spots.

**Especially for Kids**—Palais de la Decouverte, a children's science museum; La Menagerie, Paris' oldest zoo; Jardin d'Acclimatation, a 25-acre/10-hectare park in the Bois de Boulogne; the Jardin des Plantes with its small zoo; Cite des Enfants at the Parc de la Villette; Disneyland Paris, just a short train ride from the center of the city.

### Geography

Paris is divided into 20 arrondissements, or districts, which spiral outward clockwise from Ile de la Cite. Knowing the arrondissements will help tremendously in navigating the city. For example, in an address with a Parisian postal code such as 75008 or 75018, the first numbers indicate Paris and the last two digits tell you the arrondissement (in this case, the 8th and 18th, respectively).

Along the Right Bank (Rive Droite)—that is, along the north bank of the Seine—lie the grand boulevards (such as the Champs Elysees, in the 8th), stately facades featuring Haussmanian or art-nouveau architecture, the Arc de Triomphe, the Opera Garnier (9th) and the Louvre (1st).

Tucked away in the midst of all this grandeur are the trendy, winding streets of the Marais District (4th), where you can see several of Paris' oldest surviving buildings. Montmartre (18th), the northernmost area of the Right Bank, resembles a little village, with steep, cobblestoned streets, oft-photographed staircases and tiny, ivy-covered houses. The area around the Bastille (11th)—where the infamous prison once stood—has become one of the trendiest pockets of Paris, with numerous cafes and clubs, as well as barge restaurants on the refurbished Villette Basin (19th).

Although the Left Bank (Rive Gauche) has the reputation for being slightly funkier than the Right, it is also very chic and home to some of the most expensive real estate in Paris. The Latin Quarter (5th) is always buzzing with activity, especially with students of Sorbonne University.

The cafes of St. Germain des Pres (6th) are experiencing renewed interest among followers of such philosophers as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, who once gathered there to debate existentialism. Montparnasse (14th), formerly the home of Picasso, Alberto Giacometti and other artists, is a bustling neighborhood adjacent to St. Germain des Pres. It's crowded with cinemas and famous brasseries.

La Defense refers to the cluster of skyscrapers on the northwestern edge of Paris that makes up the modern business district. The landmark of this quarter is La Grande Arche—a massive, futuristic arch of glass, granite and marble that serves as a modern echo of Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe.

*Note:* In this guide, the ordinal number in parentheses following each street address indicates the arrondissement in which an address is located. For example, (7th) refers to the 7th arrondissement. The nearest metro stop is given after the arrondissement. Also, in an address, don't be confused by the word *bis* after a street number. If you see *10-bis*, for instance, it indicates the door or building next to No. 10.

## History

Paris started out as a little village inhabited by a tribe of people known as the Parisii. The original settlement was located on an island in the Seine River that later became the Roman island-city of Lutetia; today it's the Ile de la Cite, the site of Notre-Dame Cathedral. Over the centuries, Paris expanded onto the right and left (north and south) banks of the river, and the city's defensive walls were pushed outward in ever-expanding concentric "circles" to accommodate the growing population; there are places in Paris where you can still see remnants of the first walls commissioned by Philippe Auguste in the 12th century. During the Middle Ages, Paris buzzed with the construction of Notre-Dame, and the swampland on the right bank was drained, creating the area now called the Marais, or "marsh."

The Middle Ages and Renaissance also brought to Paris some of France's most powerful kings, including Louis IX (or "St. Louis" as he was later known) and Henri IV, who was the first of the Bourbon kings to rule. Henri IV enacted the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which ended the religious wars in France between the Catholics and the Protestant minority.

In the 1660s, as France moved into the "Grand Century," Louis XIV—the Sun King—built Les Invalides in Paris as a home for aging and unwell soldiers, and the magnificent attached domed chapel called L'Eglise St.-Louis des Invalides. He also ordered the expansion of the Palace of Versailles, which had been a relatively modest royal retreat, into a formidable palace. He moved the court from Paris to Versailles to escape rising unrest in the Paris streets.

Under Louis XVI and his queen, Marie Antoinette, French subjects rose up and started the French Revolution in 1789 (by tearing down the infamous Bastille prison), which brought the executions of thousands of people by guillotine—the king and queen among them, in 1793.

After the fervor of the revolution died down, Napoleon Bonaparte ruled France as emperor (after a coup d'etat in 1799) until his final defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Under Napoleon's rule, Paris gained some impressive monuments, including the Arc de Triomphe, and France gained the Napoleonic Code of law. In 1861, Napoleon's body was transferred from St. Helena and laid to rest in a monumental tomb under the Dome of Les Invalides.

A series of short-lived empires followed the Napoleonic era, but they were replaced by the Third French Republic in 1870 (which remained in place until Hitler's army marched into Paris in 1940). The avenues and broad boulevards that have come to symbolize the city date from 19th-century urban planner Baron Haussmann, who carved them out of the winding medieval districts. (The wider streets not only looked impressive, they also could support rapid troop deployment in case of civil rebellion.)

The late 19th century ushered in France's richest artistic period in centuries, with the impressionist and post impressionist movements. The Belle Epoque, the period of fine and peaceful years before the outbreak of the First World War, also coincided with Art Nouveau, an art movement that spawned the famous Guimard metro entrances. Renoir, Monet, Degas, Manet and Toulouse-Lautrec all lived or worked in the city during the late 19th century, and Gustave Eiffel oversaw the construction of what would become Paris' most-celebrated landmark, originally built as a temporary structure for the 1889 Universal Exposition.

The period of World War I cast a dark shadow over Paris and all of Europe, but the city rebounded in the 1920s and 1930s during the ebullient Jazz Age. Paris became home to such performers and writers as Josephine Baker and Ernest Hemingway, as well as many painters, including Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

During World War II, Paris was occupied by the German army, and resistance fighters working with the French government in exile were pitted against sympathizers of the so-called Vichy government.

Today, as throughout its history, Paris is one of Europe's most important artistic, political, cultural, educational and commercial centers. There are plenty of monumental contemporary landmarks in the city, too: the pyramid at the Louvre, the Pompidou Center and the stunning Bibliotheque Nationale are prominent examples.

Paris is a city in constant flux, with many new faces, styles, ethnic groups and different religious persuasions, but it is also a city firmly rooted in its traditions. It is this constant pull between old and new that makes it such a vibrant and endlessly fascinating place to visit.

## Potpourri

When the Eiffel Tower was unveiled at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, there were many protests about the avant-garde structure. But 2 million people still managed to climb it that year, solidifying it as a cornerstone of Paris architecture. One of the most unique climbing methods occurred in 2002 when Hugues Richard rode up 747 steps on a bicycle. It took him 19 minutes and four seconds, and his feet never touched the floor.

The Latin Quarter (the area on the Left Bank surrounding the Sorbonne University) got its name because it was the first center of higher learning in France during the Middle Ages, a time when scholars did all their studies in Latin.

The construction of Notre-Dame Cathedral took more than 170 years to complete. It contains the largest pipe organ in France. In the late 1990s, Parisian officials decided to clean the sooty facade of the church. High-powered lasers were used to burn off the outside grime. The steeple was left with the dirt on it to remind everyone of what it used to look like.

When the Pere Lachaise Cemetery opened in 1804, it didn't have any customers at first as people thought it was too far from the city center. Someone had the bright idea of transferring the bodies of Abelard and Heloise, the famous medieval lovers, and it has been a tourist attraction and busy cemetery ever since.

Paris' nickname as the City of Light has nothing to do with nature's light or the way it is illuminated at night. It refers to the artists and intellectuals who flocked there, making it a city of enlightenment.

Despite its name, the Pont Neuf (New Bridge) is the oldest surviving Seine bridge of Paris. It was built between 1578 and 1607. The most recent Seine bridge is the Pont Simone de Beauvoir, which opened in 2006.

In the late 1800s, poor Parisians suffered from a lack of affordable drinking water. To provide an alternative to liquor-as-substitute, British philanthropist Richard Wallace financed and designed free drinking fountains and had them placed all across the city. Their aesthetically pleasing, dark green cast-iron forms, often depicting four female figures (representing kindness, simplicity, charity and sobriety) are still in use today and are often the only source of free, safe drinking water for the city's homeless.

Paris has been (and continues to be) the backdrop of many famous movies, ranging from *An American in Paris* (1951) and the erotic *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) to *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *Amelie* (2001) and *Paris Je T'aime* (2006). Even Disney got into the act with 2007's popular *Ratatouille*.

## Hotel Overview

Paris has a wide range of hotels, from the modest to the ultraluxurious, many situated in popular neighborhoods—the Tuileries, St. Germain, Champs-Elysees and Opera areas. The side streets of the Latin Quarter are filled with small and medium-sized budget hotels of mixed quality, though some excellent finds are still possible. A number of cheaper hotels are also clustered near the various main railway stations, but these tend to be a bit dicier, and the neighborhoods are often less interesting. Avoid single rooms as doubles are only marginally more expensive and usually larger and more comfortable. When business is slow you can often bargain the price down a little.

Pools are not a common feature of Paris hotels, but fitness rooms are catching on. For a quiet room, ask for *une chambre sur cour* (facing the courtyard) and avoid ones that are *sur rue* (facing the street). Reservations are recommended year-round but are absolutely necessary

beginning in May throughout the summer and in the fall, a big season for trade fairs and conventions. Most hotels offer lower weekend rates. Prices must be posted at the door of the hotel. If you arrive in Paris without a reservation, your best chance to find a room is around 11 am.

Apartments are other options for a comfortable and affordable stay in this rather expensive city. For longer stays, a "studio" can be rented. Furnished rental apartments are also a smart option if you're staying for a week or more and have small children; you can shop locally for foods your family enjoys and prepare some meals at home. (You may find that some restaurants are not stroller-friendly.)

## See & Do

### Sightseeing

Paris inspires grandeur. From Napoleon's imposing Arc de Triomphe to Eiffel's pioneering tower and even to the whimsical Centre Pompidou, every notable landmark seems to have monumental proportions. But Paris has delights of a smaller, quieter nature; manicured parks and flower gardens give a green backdrop and a serene beauty to the broad avenues, soaring cathedrals and marble monuments.

On the Left Bank, the 5th arrondissement neighborhood around the famed Sorbonne University is the Latin Quarter. The Quarter has always had an intellectual, international, bohemian character because of the influx of students who come to study in Paris from all over the world. Although its winding streets offer some fast-food restaurants that cater to student budgets, you can safely ignore them and continue northwest until you come to the trendier cafes of St. Germain. Alternately, you can take a stroll in Ernest Hemingway's neighborhood on the popular Rue Mouffetard.

Also on the Left Bank are the city's most famous domes: the gilded Hotel des Invalides—a military museum that includes Napoleon's tomb—and the colonnaded Pantheon, the final resting place of many French notables. To the west is the Eiffel Tower, originally built as a "temporary" exhibit as part of the 1889 Universal Exposition to commemorate the centennial of the French Revolution.

From the Left Bank, cross the Pont Neuf to the Ile de la Cite with its two Gothic masterpieces, Sainte-Chapelle (a church with extraordinary stained-glass windows) and Notre-Dame Cathedral.

On the Right Bank, the Centre Pompidou (also known as Beaubourg), is one of the world's most novel structures with its "inside-out" colorful architecture; it also houses the city's best collection of modern art. A short walk to the east brings you to the national museum of Paris' most famous artist-in-residence, Pablo Picasso. A bit farther to the north, set atop the hill of Montmartre, are the neighborhood's lovely cemetery and the white-domed splendor of Sacre Coeur.

In the very center of the Right Bank, along the river, is the Louvre, once the residence of French kings (until Louis XIV moved the royal court to his splendid new palace at Versailles). The Louvre is a massive museum housing many of the greatest works of art from ancient times through the 18th century—including three famous women: *Venus de Milo*, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* and Leonardo da Vinci's mysterious *Mona Lisa*—and it is impossible to digest in one visit.

The Place de la Concorde, site of beheadings by guillotine during the French Revolution and tank duels during World War II, is at the opposite end of the Tuileries Gardens from the Louvre. The 3,300-year-old Obelisk of Luxor at its center was a gift from Egyptian viceroy Muhammad Ali to Louis Philippe in 1829; it has dominated the square ever since. Connecting the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe, which commemorates the victories of Napoleon, is the magnificent Avenue des Champs Elysees, lined with shops, showrooms, sidewalk cafes and cinemas.

When you tire of monuments, visit the Rodin Museum, the dazzling Musee d'Orsay (19th-century and impressionist art) and the Cluny Museum (from Roman baths to medieval art, including the 15th-century tapestry series *The Lady and the Unicorn*). And when you're ready to relax, take an unabashedly touristy trip down the Seine on the *bateaux mouches* (sightseeing boats), have a seat on the *terrasse* of any nearby cafe while you enjoy an espresso or a cup of sinfully rich hot chocolate, or just pull up a chair and people-watch like a real Parisian in the beautifully manicured Luxembourg or Tuileries gardens.

### Historic Sites



## Arc de Triomphe

Take a trip to the top of this magnificent example of Napoleonic self-celebration. At 164 ft/50 m high, it is the world's second-tallest triumphal arch. Climbing to the top offers a view of the entire city. Twelve avenues (courtesy of Haussman) radiate outward to create the Etoile (star), while the Arc itself is decorated with larger-than-life sculptures and friezes. Underneath it lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The safest way to get to the monument is through the tunnel on the north side of the Champs Elysees (near Cartier); traffic in the *rond-point* (circle) is perilous, so don't try crossing above ground.

April-September daily 10 am-11 pm; October-March daily 10 am-10:30 pm. 9.50 euros adults; online ticket sales available via the Web site save time. Guided tours in English available with advance reservation (phone 01-4454-1930).

Place Charles de Gaulle (8th; Metro Charles de Gaulle-Etoile)  
Paris, France 75008

**Phone:** 01-5537-7377

**Web:** <http://arc-de-triomphe.monuments-nationaux.fr>

## Catacombes

At the end of the 18th century, millions of bones of Paris' dead were transferred to these underground quarries when their previous resting place, the Cimetiere des Innocents, became overcrowded and a serious health risk for the neighbors. The Catacombs also served as French resistance headquarters during World War II; the Nazis never discovered their secret use. Nowadays many thousands of people enjoy visiting this underground labyrinth. Be aware that the tour of the catacombs is 1-mi/2-km long and requires descending 134 steps and walking up 83 more. Also on-site is the Port-Mahon sculpture gallery, where visitors can view a fine relief sculpture of the Port-Mahon fortress.

Daily except Monday 10 am-5 pm (last entry at 4 pm). 8 euros adults, 4 euros young people ages 14-26, free for children younger than 14 (must be accompanied by an adult). Guided visits are available.

1 Ave. du Colonel Henri Rol-Tanguy/Place Denfert-Rochereau (14th; Metro Denfert-Rochereau)  
Paris, France 75014

**Phone:** 01-4322-4763

**Web:** <http://www.catacombes-de-paris.fr>

## Conciergerie

Just steps from Notre Dame and Sainte-Chapelle, this once-luxurious royal palace (Paris' first) and seat of power was eventually turned into the city courthouse. During the Reign of Terror, it became a stopping point for prisoners on their way to the guillotine. It is especially beautiful at night, as it is lit up against the Seine. You can see the cells of Maximilien Robespierre, Georges-Jacques Danton and Marie Antoinette in a setting of beautiful 14th-century Gothic architecture. The Salle des Gens d'Armes, built 1302-1313, is most impressive: It is the largest secular hall of the Middle Ages.

Open daily 9:30 am-6 pm (last entry 30 minutes before closing). 7 euros adults; joint ticket Conciergerie and Sainte-Chapelle 14 euros.

2 Blvd. du Palais (1st; Metro Cite or Chatelet)  
Paris, France 75001

**Phone:** 01-5340-6080

**Web:** <http://conciergerie.monuments-nationaux.fr>

## Eiffel Tower

This 1,063-ft/324-m, 10,100-ton marvel of metal latticework was completed in 1889. Derided as a "hideous lamppost," it offended many prominent Parisians who wanted to preserve the city's aesthetics and was almost disassembled in 1909. But after its radio-tower capabilities were discovered, it remained intact and became a symbol of Paris. Until 1930, when the 1,048-ft/319.5-m-tall Chrysler Building was built, the Eiffel Tower (then measuring 1,023 ft/312 m) was the tallest building in the world.

The views from its three levels are extraordinary—well worth the wait in line. The interior lighting system makes the tower look like a big golden candle at night. Every hour on the hour, the tower shimmers and sparkles for 10 minutes (from nightfall to 1 am in winter and till 2 am in summer).

Open daily September to mid-June 9:30 am-11 pm; mid-June to August 9 am-midnight. The last entrance is 45 minutes before closing time.

Admission fee varies based on access. Expect to wait at least an hour when taking elevators, as almost 7 million people visit the tower each year. If you have a reservation for the Jules Verne restaurant on the second floor, you can take a different elevator to avoid the long wait.

Champs de Mars (7th; Metro Champs de Mars Tour Eiffel)  
Paris, France 75007

**Web:** <http://www.tour-eiffel.fr>