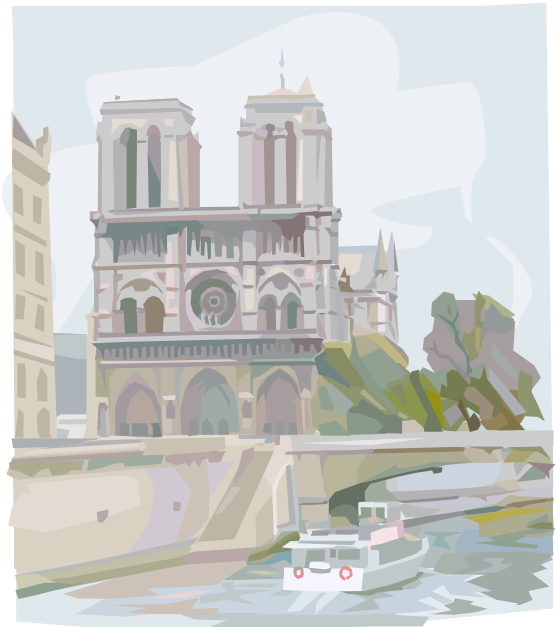


The Hidden Secrets of Paris

A Traveler's Guide to the City of Light

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Introduction

This is my personal guide to Paris. It has been compiled through my many trips to Paris over the years. Over time, I have made many discoveries and new friends in the City of Light. I have visited virtually every attraction, every hotel, every restaurant listed here. I give my personal recommendations as well as my opinions.

With this publication I hope to show you some of my favorite spots as well as give you some valuable insight on how to make your vacation to Paris and France enjoyable and enriching. I also have some useful money-saving tips that will let you enjoy this beautiful place without sacrificing luxury or comfort.

My Favorite Attractions

[Cluny Museum \(Musee National du Moyen Age-Thermes et Hotel de Cluny\)](#)

This museum of medieval art is located in the heart of the Latin Quarter at the intersection of Boulevard St. Germain and Boulevard St. Michel. It is on the site of Ancient Gallo-Roman baths. It contains some beautiful objects from the Middle Ages. *One of my favorite hidden gems. The artifacts and famous tapestries are impressive. Located on the site of old Roman thermal baths. Have a take-out lunch in the beautiful gardens. Don't miss this one for a relaxing day. 1.5-2 hours.*

<http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/ang/index.html>

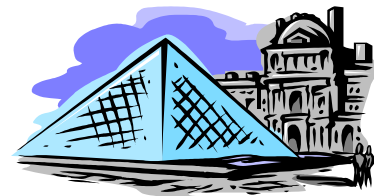
[Musee d'Orsay](#)

This beautiful museum is located in a former railroad station on the left bank. It contains a very extraordinary collection of works from the impressionist painters and some fantastic sculptures in a very beautiful setting. *In my opinion, this museum is better than the Louvre. On the top floor where they keep the Impressionist paintings, it is just one great painting after another great, great painting. The sculpture is wonderful and the building itself is a marvel. A few surprises here too. Have lunch in the wonderful restaurant in the museum. Crowded on weekends. You should spend two half-days here. Open late Thursdays. Web site: <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/>*

[Musee du Louvre](#)

Perhaps the most famous museum in Paris, it is home to Mona Lisa, the Code of Hammurabi, The Crowning of Napoleon, Napoleon's Apartments, Winged Victory (Nike), Venus de Milo, Vermeer's "The Lacemaker" and more, the Louvre is considered the world's greatest art museum.

It has an unparalleled collection of items covering the full spectrum of art through the ages. The famous glass pyramid that you saw in "The Da Vinci Code" is here. *No doubt a great museum, but the great pieces get lost with within its massive space. Go at night – less crowds. You only need 2-3 hours here if you carefully plan it. Check out the wonderful sculpture.* Museum Web site: <http://www.louvre.fr/llv/musee/alaune.jsp>



[Notre Dame Cathedral \(Cathedrale de Notre Dame de Paris\)](#)

This cathedral is a famous example of 12th century Gothic architecture. It stands on the Île de la Cité and is close to Ste. Chapelle and la Conciergerie. *This of course is a "do not miss" Don't miss it. If you want to climb to the top, get there early, before 9 a.m. No admission fee to get into the cathedral itself and the Museum Pass does not let you skip the line to get into the towers). Make sure you bring binoculars to view the stained glass and other objects. You may wish to visit the "Treasury" for a few euro inside the cathedral. Watch out for gypsies and pick-pockets. Ile St. Louis is directly across the bridge from Notre Dame. St. Chapelle and the Conciergerie are also in the immediate area. This is where I always start my trip in Paris. In the center of the "Parvis" (yes, the spelling is correct) or the plaza in front of the cathedral, you will notice a bronze marker from which all distances in France are measured from. The Crown of Thorns, worn by Jesus, are put on display at Notre Dame every Friday during Lent and on the 1st Friday of each month. 1-2 hours. Web site: <http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>*

[Ste. Chapelle](#)

This is a church dating back to the 13th century. It was built by King St. Louis to house the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus. This church has perhaps the best collection of stained glass of the period. They also have regularly scheduled concerts. *This is a "can't miss" place. The stained glass is very impressive, maybe more impressive than that of Notre Dame. Bring a pair of binoculars. Very close to Notre Dame. 1 hour. Web site: <http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>*

[la Conciergerie](#)

This is a former jail that held some very famous prisoners such as Marie Antoinette during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror. *You can see Marie Antoinette's jail cell where she waited before she was executed. Used to have an interesting tour. Last time I was there it was not available. Near St. Chappelle and Notre Dame. They sometimes have some rotating exhibits. 45 minutes. Web site: <http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>*

[Berthillon](#)

This is a very famous ice cream shop located on Île St-Louis. *All the flavors are wonderful, especially the fruit flavors. Some say they have the best ice cream in the world. Closed in August – yes that's right – closed in August.*

[Pont-Neuf](#)

This bridge is the oldest in Paris and has been depicted in painting by many famous artists. *The bridges over the Seine, especially those near Notre Dame, are most romantic at night, with a view of the Eiffel Tower in the distance. Generally, these areas are very safe at night.*



[Musee Picasso](#)

This is a museum which has a wonderful collection of Picasso paintings that rotate on a regular basis. The museum is located in a 17th century hotel. *Located in the Marais. A great museum. Don't miss it. 2 hours. Web site: <http://www.musee-picasso.fr/>*

[Place des Vosges](#)

Located in the heart of the Marais, this is the oldest public square in Paris. It is surrounded by wonderful 17th century townhouses. *Visit Victor Hugo's house. 45 minutes. Victor Hugo home website: <http://www.paris.org/Musees/Hugo/>*

[Musee Carnavalet](#)

The museum of the history of Paris. There are impressive exhibits on Voltaire and Rousseau. *Located in the Marais, it is an interesting exhibit. Admission is free. 1 hour. Web site: <http://www.paris.org/Musees/Carnavalet/>*

[Sacre-Coeur](#)

This 19th century basilica was built by the French government following the Franco-Prussian War. It provides a stunning view of the city. This landmark is built on the highest point in Paris and provides excellent views of the city. *What a view! Take the funicular to the basilica. Walk around the neighborhood behind the church if you have time. Nearby is the Place de Tertre where you will see many artists. Very popular site, perhaps the most popular in Paris. Very hilly. Watch for pick-pockets! The neighborhood of Montmartre is where much of the movie "Amelie" takes place. Web site: <http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/us/index.html>*

[Moulin Rouge](#)

This is the world-famous risqué cabaret house with the 19th century windmill atop of it. It has been entertaining audiences since the 19th century. *In my opinion, don't waste your time or money on the show. It is a real tourist trap. This attraction is in Montmartre and you may wish to visit during your trip to Sacre Couer. Web site: <http://www.moulinrouge.fr/home-flash-gb.html>*

[Arc de Triomphe](#)

This is one of the most famous landmarks in Paris. The tomb of the unknown is located here. It is the scene of the U.S. troops liberating Paris and a symbol of victory for triumphant French troops. *If you want a real challenge, try crossing the street to get to the monument (only kidding!). Actually, there are tunnels under the streets for you to access the landmark. About 40 minutes. Web site: <http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>*



[Eiffel Tower \(Tour Eiffel\)](#)

This is perhaps the most famous landmark in the world. It was completed in 1889 for the Paris World Fair. Once hated by the Parisians, it is now their symbol of pride. *OK, it's your first trip to Paris. You have to go. Either get there very early in the morning or it is very nice to go at night. In my opinion, it is best viewed from afar at night, especially on one of the "ponts" crossing the Seine. Watch out for aggressive vendors and pick-pockets. Not on museum pass. One hour unless you go to the top which could take 2-4 hours. Web site: <http://www.tour-eiffel.fr/teiffel/uk/>*

[Sewers of Paris \(Les Egouts de Paris\)](#)

This is an hour-long tour of some of the 1,300 miles that make up the Paris sewer system. *Fascinating. Near Eiffel Tower, at the Pont de Alma. If you are in Paris in the hot weather, go here to cool off. They also have a humorous video presentation a la "Cops". 1 hour. Website (not a good one): <http://www.v1.paris.fr/en/>*

[Pere-Lachaise Cemetery \(Cimetiere du Pere-Lachaise\)](#)

This is a very famous cemetery that is the final resting place of some very famous French and foreign writers, musicians, authors, politicians, and artists. *Jim Morrison, Max Ernst, Maria Callas, Oscar Wilde, Edith Piaf, Gertrude Stein, and many other famous names are buried here. Don't miss the holocaust monuments. Buy the map at the entrance. Admission is free. Restrooms may not be "modern". You need to consider that the cemetery is large and may take some time to cover. Wear comfortable shoes, the walkways are cobblestones. The web site is excellent: <http://www.pere-lachaise.com/perelachaise.htm>*

[The Catacombs \(Les Catacombs\)](#)

This is an underground stone quarry that holds about six million skeletons. *It is absolutely fascinating. Bring a flashlight and watch your head. Does not take the museum pass. Some people find it to be great, some find it gruesome. Lots of walking and steps. About 90 minutes. Website: <http://www.paris.org/Musees/Catacombes/info.html>*

[Musee Marmottan](#)

A museum containing some fabulous works of Impressionists, especially Monet. *The best kept secret in Paris. An absolutely fantastic collection of Monet's paintings are displayed here in a relaxing atmosphere, quite different from what you will find at the Orsay. Don't miss it especially if you are an art lover. A little bit out of the way. No photos. No museum pass. About 90 minutes. Website: <http://www.marmottan.com/uk/>*



Opera Garnier

A romantic opera house located in the center of the city. Since the construction of the Opéra de Paris Bastille in 1989, the Opera Garnier is used primarily for ballet performances. *On Thursday afternoons, they have the tour in English. A gorgeous, romantic building. Home of the "Phantom of the Opera". The Roissybus from CDG drops you here. 1 hour. Website (French): <http://www.operadeparis.fr/>*

Basilique St-Denis

It is the burial place of nearly all of the kings and queens of France. This is one strange place. A long metro ride. You will see the tombs of people you read about in your history books – Clovis, Marie Antoinette, Louis XIV. Not for the faint hearted. I found it fascinating. 2 hours. 45 minute metro ride from center of Paris.

Website: <http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>

Musee des Arts et Metiers

This is a museum containing artifacts of engineering, science, and technology. *More than fascinating. The first PC (so the French claim), Foucault's Pendulum, Edison's machines, TV's from 1931. You will be in awe of some of the exhibits. Essentially, it is a history of engineering and technology museum that is bound to surprise you with its amazing collection. 2- 3 hours. Web site: http://www.betons.arts-et-metiers.net/main_ie.html*

La Cite des Sciences et de L'Industrie

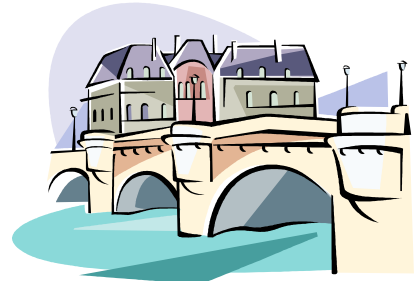
A gigantic science museum located on the outskirts of the city. Appropriate for those interested in science and non-scientists alike. *This is one of the best kept secrets in Paris. Perhaps the best science museum in the world. I could spend 2 days here – seriously. Kids are amazed by this museum, adults are astounded. I understand the music museum is nearby, but I have never been to it. You can combine your trip here with a trip down the Canal St. Martin. Website: <http://www.cite-sciences.fr/english/indexFLASH.htm>*

Musee Rodin

This is the former home of the famous sculptor. Home of "The Thinker". Impressive gardens and visitor center. *Wonderful sculpture. Eat at a "croque madame" at the brasserie around the corner. Combine with a trip to Napoleon's Tomb and the Military Museum. 1.5 hours. Website: <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/welcome.htm>*

Army Museum (Musee de l'Armee)

A museum dedicated to the French military. Exhibits on uniforms, weapons, and military equipment. *This is a do not miss site. Go to the World War II exhibit and see how De Gaulle won the war. There is a very sobering exhibit in the World War II section on the holocaust. Fascinating. 2.5 hours. Website: http://www.invalides.org/pages/anglais/menu_ang.html*



Napoleon's Tomb

Combine with your trip to the Army Museum and Rodin's gardens. ½ hour. Website: http://www.invalides.org/pages/anglais/menu_ang.html

Bateaux Mouches

A boat ride down the River Seine. Depart from a location across the river from but near Eiffel Tower, Pont de Alma. A very relaxing and worthwhile tour. You may prefer the cruise down Canal St. Martin too. 1.5 hours. And don't forget, the **Bateaux Parisien** has a nice dinner cruise. Near the Egouts de Paris. Website: <http://www.bateauxmouches.com/>

Canal St. Martin-Canauxrama

A lovely boat tour through the canals of Paris. Remember the movie "Amelie"? You get a wonderful opportunity to view some pretty neighborhoods of Paris. People watch you as you pass through the locks. Complete with historical commentary, depart from the Parc de la Villette and end up at the Bastille. A very relaxing and worthwhile tour. I highly recommend it. Sit at the very front of the boat. 1.5 hours.

Web site: http://www.canauxrama.com/e_saint-martin.htm

Chateau de Versailles, Versailles

A stunningly huge chateau near Paris. It was the palace of Louis XIV and a symbol of the lavish life he led. When you see the lines here, you'll be glad you bought the Museum Pass. This is an outrageously outlandish Chateaux with beautiful gardens. Take the general tour and the special tours. You need to take the RER or a bus to get to Versailles. ½ to full day. Website: <http://www.chateauversailles.fr/en/>

Luxemborg Gardens

Located in the Latin Quarter. This large park is the home to royal gardens. A great place for a stroll. Be like a real Parisian and have a wonderful picnic lunch here on a Sunday.

Tuilleries Gardens

The Central Park of Paris, although not as big. Located in front of the Louvre on the right bank. Another great place for a stroll or a Sunday picnic.

St-Sulpice

If you read *The Da Vinci Code*, you have heard of this place. The former prime meridian runs through this church. It has gotten lots of tourists since the movie. ½ hour. Website: <http://www.stsulpice.com/>

[Centre Pompidou](#)

Parisians have very mixed feelings on this museum of modern (20th century) art. It is a very popular destination. *A building that is inside-out. Contains modern art. For me, one short visit was enough. 2 hours. Website:*

<http://www.centrepompidou.fr/Pompidou/Accueil.nsf/Document/HomePage?OpenDocument&L=2>

[Pantheon](#)

The resting place of some of Paris' most famous heroes: Curie, Voltaire, Dumas, Hugo and many more. *It actually took me five trips to Paris before I visited the Pantheon. It is a little bit out of the way some most other attractions. I found it to be quite interesting, primarily because of its massive size. Foucault's Pendulum is on display and an interesting presentation (in English) is given. 1.25 hours. Website:*

<http://www.monum.fr/prehome/prehome.dml>

[Place de la Bastille](#)

Much to the surprise of many tourists, the infamous Bastille prison is no longer here. *It is the residential neighborhood of hip bars and clubs.*

[Shakespeare & Company](#)

This is an English bookstore located on the left bank on the Seine across from Notre Dame. 37 rue de la Bucherie. *It is wonderfully interesting place and a great spot to meet other English speakers. Website: <http://www.shakespeareco.org/>*

[La Defense](#)

This is a business area actually located outside the perimeter of Paris at the end of the #1 metro line. The highlight is the massive, and I mean massive, Grande Arche. *I visited this on my last trip to Paris. If you have lots of time, or you like buildings that are real big, you can fit this one in. 1.5 hours.*



Neighborhoods

[Rue Cler](#)

This is a lively cobblestone street has lively restaurants, cafes, shops near the Eiffel Tower. A very Parisian type of neighborhood street. *Many Americans like this area to stay, dine, and relax in. Market is there on Sundays.*

Montmartre

This is the most frequently visited area by tourists in Paris. It is located in the 18th Arrondissement. It is in a hilly and rural neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. It has charming homes, shops, cafes, and bistros. This area is not known for quality hotels. *Take the metro to Abbesses to start your visit. Sacre Couer is here as well as Moulin Rouge and Place de Tetre. Parts of Montmartre can be sketchy at night – especially Place Pigalle. Watch out for gypsies and pick pockets. ½ to ¾ of a day if you go to Sacre-Coeur, Place de Tetre, and tour the neighborhood.*

Champs-Elysees

The Times Square of Paris. It goes from the Place de Concorde (at the end of the Tuilleries) to the Place de l'Etoile (where the Arc de Triomphe is located). It is the scene of wild celebrations. Glitzy stores, cinemas, and galleries. *I don't particularly like this neighborhood, but some are impressed by its aura. It is the polar opposite of the Latin Quarter.*

Latin Quarter

The area on the left bank that has traditionally been the home of students, historical cafes, and lively village-like atmosphere. It is a great walking neighborhood. *I would compare it to the East Village in New York city. This is by far my most favorite place to stay.*

Ile St.-Louis

This is a classic Parisian neighborhood of cobble-stoned streets, cafes, bistros, patisseries, boulangeries and quaint shops. It is just over the bridge from Notre Dame and Ile de la Cite. Some wonderful small hotels and B&B's are located here. Very romantic. *A great walking neighborhood where you will get a true flavor of Paris. Cross the bridge (often you will see the street performers here) from Notre Dame to get there. Have ice cream at Berthillon's. Don't miss it. Afterwards, take a stroll down the Seine towards the Tour Eiffel.*

Marais

This is the Jewish and the gay section of Paris. It is a revitalized neighborhood that has regained prominence in the arts, culture, and in dining. *A charming walking neighborhood. Eat a falafel at L'as du Fallafel on Rue de Rosiers and have a pain au chocolate from one of the great bakeries. The Picasso Museum, Place des Voges, and the Carnavalet (history of Paris museum) are in the neighborhood. 3 hours. A full day if you visit the museums.*

St. Germain des Pres

Adjacent to the Latin Quarter on the left bank. It is the home of chic shops, traditional restaurants, good shopping, and trendy art galleries. *This is also a great place to stay. It lacks the glitz of Champs-Elysees but it is more of a traditional French neighborhood. A great walking neighborhood.*

Favorite Dining Spots

Parisians eat later in the evening than we do, but most restaurants are open for dinner at 6 or 7 pm. Dress is a little bit more formal (no jeans or sneakers) than in the U. S. If you wish, you can easily spend \$1,000 for dinner at places like l'Ambroise, Alain Ducasse at the Plaza Athenee, or Le Grand Vefour. Then again, there are plenty of places that you can eat very well for under 100 euro (with wine) for two.

At the top restaurants, you always need reservations. If you know of a place you really want to dine at, I suggest you make reservations through your concierge or call or stop by the restaurant a few days in advance. I have made notes regarding reservations on some of my selections.

I need to say that half the fun is finding and discovering your favorite restaurants on your own, but here are some of my picks:

Chartier. Fun and cheap. I eat here at least once every time I go to Paris. You may find your self sharing a water bottle and bread basket with a Parisian or someone from Finland, Warsaw, Buenos Aires, or Tokyo. The food is not the best in Paris, but you go here to eat as the Parisians have been doing for about 100 years. It's a lot of fun. You can get an appetizer (called an entrée in Paris), a plat (what we call an entrée in the U.S., dessert, wine (or water) for about 20 euro each. No reservations. Located near Bourse. <http://www.restaurant-chartier.com/www/visit/filsdesans.php>

Aux Lyonnais. An Alain Ducasse restaurant for 100 euro for two? You bet. Top! You need to reserve a day or two ahead of time. http://www.alain-ducasse.com/public_us/cest_aussi/fr_aulyonnais.htm

Café Constant. Casual. Great food. Get the "flotante" for dessert. On rue St. Dominique near Champs du Mars and Rue Cler. 110 euro for two. http://www.leviolondingres.com/eng_news.htm

Brasserie Lipp – on Blvd. St. Germain. I had my first meal ever in Paris here. Very traditional French/Alsatian menu. The menu (except for the prices) has not changed in 75 years. Moderate. If you want something on the same style, but less expensive, try Chartier. Reservations a day or two before dining are recommended. Ask to be seated downstairs. Dinner for two is about 125-150 euro or so. <http://www.brasserie-lipp.fr/page3.html>

La Pré Verre – You know it has to be good if the Parisians line up to get into the place. On rue Thenard in the Latin Quarter near the Cluny, across the street from the Hotel du College de France. They have a prix fixe dinner for about 30 euro each that includes wine. Lunch costs half of that. Make a reservation a day or two beforehand. http://www.choicehotels.com/ires/en-US/html/HotelInfoFrommers?hotel=FR366&evid=144069&catid=2244&city_code=PAR&sid=

Brasserie du Louvre - The restaurant in the Hotel du Louvre with a great location just steps from the museum. Nothing special. I just like it. Reservations not necessary. About 125 euro for two. <http://www.hoteldulouvre.com>

Chez Jenny – a big, bright, lively Alsatian spot near the Place de Republique. Alsatian restaurants generally have hearty dishes. I like the choucroute garnie with a bottle of gewurztraminer. Reservations needed for weekends. Moderate (100 euro for two). http://www.franceway.com/paris-restaurants/chezjenny/www.chezjenny.com/html/body_presentationgb.html

Bofinger – a turn of the century Parisian favorite. Near the Opera and Bastille. Moderate. It's near the opera house, so it's difficult to get a table before or after the opera. You need to reserve a day or two in advance. Website (French): <http://www.bofingerparis.com/>

Le Coupe Chou –Americans seem to love the place. It's romantic, it's very French, it's reasonable, and the food is good. Usually you don't need a reservation. <http://www.lecoupechou.com/index.php>

Chez Michel – A very good Brittany restaurant in the 10th on Rue de Belzunce. You will see very few tourists here, probably because the place is hard to find. It should be less than 100 euro for two, with wine. I would reserve a day or two in advance, although I walked in with no problem. Ask to be seated on the main floor. No air conditioning. Excellent. One of my top choices.

Le Train Bleu - A Belle Époque restaurant in the Gare de Lyon train station. I ate here but I really didn't like it. In all fairness, I was with a group of about 20 people and we ordered from a special menu. Cocktails were an outrageous; 12 euro each, the food was mediocre, but everyone else I know of who has eaten here likes it. Expensive and you need a reservation. No air conditioning. Website: <http://www.le-train-bleu.com/trainbleu/us/page1.html>

L'Ardoise - I have eaten at this bistro a few times and it is always very good. It is popular with the locals as well as the tourists. The seating is tight and it can be smoky. It is located at 28, rue du Mont-Thabor in the 1st close to Place Vendome and the Buddha Bar. Reserve a day or two in advance.

Les Editeurs – 4, Carrefour de l'Odeon. I never had dinner here but I would rendezvous with my French friends here for coffee or perhaps a light snack. If you look closely, you might spot a celebrity here. Inexpensive. Website: <http://www.lesediteurs.fr>

L'As due Fallafel – A Jewish deli-type of restaurant on 34 rue des Rosiers in the Marais. I like it so much for their 5-7 euro Fallafels (they actually call them "Cocktail de Viandes" which literally means "Meat Cocktail") that I keep their business card

tacked on my corkboard in my kitchen. A great little take-away (“emporter” in French) place or fine for a sit-down lunch.

Café Le Petit Pont – What a view of Notre Dame! I have spent many a late evening sitting at this café with friends. Romantic. I heard the food is good too. Sometimes they have jazz in the evenings. 1 rue du Petit Pont on the left bank. It is very close to Shakespeare & Company bookstore (see entry under “My Favorite Attractions”).

Angelina – The world’s best hot chocolate. Located in a 1903 tearoom on Rue de Rivoli near the Louvre along the Tuileries Gardens. This is a touristy place that serves absolutely decadent hot chocolate and pastries.

Other Recommendations:

- For a very romantic dinner, try 1728 in the 8th (8 rue d'Anjou, <http://www.frommers.com/destinations/paris/D54500.html>). I can't ever remember dining at a more romantic setting.
- They claim the oldest restaurant in Paris is le Procope. Touristy. No air conditioning. See the website: <http://www.procope.com/en/index.htm>
- Leon of Bruxelles is a chain of inexpensive to moderate restaurants. I like it for a quick and simple meal of mussels and frites (fries) and Belgian treats. Website (French): <http://www.leon-de-bruxelles.fr/>
- Here are some recommended gourmet restaurants that I have visited that might cost you as much as \$1,000 for dinner. Very good for special occasions: *l'Ambroise*, *Alain Ducasse at the Plaza Athenee*, *Jules Verne* (at the Eiffel Tower and is less expensive than the others).

Also, if you look in the NY Times online, (www.nytimes.com), go to the Paris section of the travel section and look for an article “Does the Affordable Paris Bistro Still Exist? Oui” by Marc Bittman. There are some excellent reviews of inexpensive Paris bistros. I have eaten in nearly all of them.

Flea Markets

The most popular one is at the Port de Clingancourt (les puces de paris <http://www.parispuces.com/>) It is enormous! But the vendors buy their stuff at the smaller flea market at Porte de Vanves on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Items at Paris flea markets are rarely bargains. Again, watch the pick-pockets and scam artists.

Shopping

This is one area that I am not an expert at. I rarely shop when I am in Paris. However, Paris does have some large department stores. A popular shopping areas is on the Champs Elysees where you will find contemporary chic fashions. Along Boulevard Hausmann in the Opera district you will find more traditional department stores (*le grands magasins*) like Au Printemps and Galleries Lafayette. If you are in Paris from November through December, you must check out their wonderful holiday window displays. Other popular shopping

locations include Le Bon Marche on the left bank, and BHV which is a combination of a French Home Depot and Macy's rolled into one. Here are some links for you to investigate: http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Paris/Shopping/Paris_deptstores.shtml and http://www.10best.com/Paris/Shopping/Department_Stores/index.html.

Museum Pass

You must buy the Museum Pass (MP). It comes in 2, 4, and 6 consecutive day admissions for 30, 45 and 60 euros respectively. *The advantage to the MP is that it gets you into many of the attractions without having to wait in line.* You'll save some money too. If you fly Air France you can buy it in New York at the Air France check in area. Otherwise, buy it at a museum where there are fewer crowds (Cluny, Picasso, The Archaeological Exhibit in front of Notre Dame, etc.), so you don't have to wait in line. Web site: http://www.intermusees.com/flash/hp_fr.html

Are Parisians Rude?

When you walk into a shop or restaurant, Parisians expect a greeting before a conversation is initiated. If you don't, they may think YOU are rude and they in turn, may be rude also. I usually say "Bonjour, Hello" to show them I appreciate their language but that I speak English. I rarely have a problem with Parisians if I follow their protocol. After all, I am in their country.

It is true that some Parisian waiters can be surly. But that's part of the reason why Paris is so much fun! Seriously, if you encounter a rude waiter, be polite but firm to them. Generally, they will then back right down and quickly become your best friend.

Tipping

In restaurants, the tip is included in the price of the meal. Americans sometimes feel very uncomfortable about leaving no tip or a small tip. In a moderately priced restaurant, a two euro tip per person is very generous. Trust me, anything more is excessive.

If you use your concierge at your hotel, tip them. If I find the concierge being helpful, I will give him a 10 euro tip at the beginning of the trip and another 10 at the end if he has been helpful.

Language and Customs

Do you need to speak French to get by? Absolutely not. Many Parisians understand basic English and many signs are also in English. However, you should make an effort to learn some very essential French phrases like "bonjour", "merci", etc. I find it helpful to greet a Parisian with "Bonjour, Hello". They immediately recognize that I am an English speaker but appreciate my French greeting.

The only thing you may have trouble with if you don't know ANY French is reading a menu. It wouldn't be a bad idea to get a basic French guide book that describes what you might find on a menu.

The French tend to be a bit more formal than we are here in the United States. I always greet any Parisian, including retail clerks, civil service workers, or anyone else for that matter, with "bonjour/hello" before I initiate a conversation with them. I always end my conversation with "merci" or "au revoir".

I never wear sneakers in Paris. Jeans are OK but I would never wear them to dinner. I always offer a lady my seat on the bus or metro.

VAT

The VAT (Value Added Tax) is like a hidden sales tax (about 15%-20%) added on to almost everything you buy. If you make a large purchase (over 175 euro, I would say) on items like jewelry, clothes, works of art, ask the retailer about how you can get your VAT refunded. Here is a website for more info:

<http://62.39.109.53/finc.asp?page=particulier/detaxenglish.htm&cusnum=1260>

Handicapped Access

Unfortunately Paris and Europe in general, does not provide the services and accommodations for handicapped or elderly that we have here in the U.S. Please be aware that some buildings and public transportation have inadequate facilities for those who may be physically challenged. Also, some streets are paved in cobblestones that make walking on them very difficult if you don't have comfortable footwear. Some restaurants and facilities still even have Turkish toilets.

Money

In France and in much of Europe, the euro is the standard currency. U.S. dollars are not accepted at all. If you can, bring a few euro with you. Once you get to Paris, I suggest that you use your credit card as much as you can to get the true conversion rate, although most banks also charge a small fee when you use your credit card. The same applies when you use an ATM. There are plenty of ATM's in Paris. To be on the safe side, bring at least 2 different ATM cards with you with at least one of them being from a major U.S. bank like Citibank or Chase. I have had trouble getting money with an ATM card from my local credit union.



Driving in Paris

In my opinion, you have to be out of your mind to be a tourist and drive in Paris. The traffic is horrendous, you will be unfamiliar with the roads, the parking is terrible, and gas is much more expensive than it is in the U.S. The public transportation system is so good, there is no need to drive. If you are taking a side trip outside of Paris, take a train to your first destination and rent a car from there. For instance, when I went to the Loire Valley, I took the train to Tours and rented a car there.

What Can't You Get in Paris

Paris is a big city. There are supermarkets, drugstores, convenience stores, etc. In short, they have everything in Paris that we have here in the U.S., except on a smaller scale. Until the arrival Starbucks, the only thing you couldn't get in Paris that you could get in the U.S. is coffee in a paper cup!

What to Wear

If you want to look like a tourist, wear sneakers, shorts, t-shirt and anything with a logo on it. If you want to blend in and look like a Parisian wear long pants (jeans are OK), dark shirt, and comfortable shoes and if you really want to blend in, a nice scarf will do it! I know I am assimilating myself to the French culture when the French come up to me to ask me questions.

When to Visit

In the summer, the airfares are expensive, the hotels charge "peak" prices, the city is crowded and the weather is hot. And remember, A/C is not as prevalent in Paris as it is in the U.S. Also, many of the best restaurants and some shops are closed in August as many Parisians go on vacation. I like traveling during the off-peak period which is from the middle of October until the middle of May. It rarely snows in the winter but you can get a lot of rain in the springtime. In fact, it rains about 200 days a year in Paris.

Side Trips from Paris

During longer stays in France (7 days or more), I like to arrive in Paris, stay for 2 or 3 days, take a day trip or a 3-4 day road trip, and end up with the end of my stay in Paris. Generally, hotels and B&B's outside of Paris are inexpensive. A resource I use is for places to stay is *Relais & Chateaux* guide. Web site: www.relaischateaux.com/. I don't travel to Paris in the summer, so I have never really had trouble finding a place to stay without a reservation, except in Bayeux (near Normandy invasion beaches).

Loire Valley – the Chateaux here are nothing short of fabulous. I took the TGV (high speed train) to Tours, rented a car and spent 2-3 days visiting the wonderful castles and sampling the wines. I stayed in chateaux that I found in the *Relais & Chateaux* guide. You can easily do 10 days in the Loire visiting the chateaux but a 2 or 3 day trip is possible. My favorite chateaux are Château de Chenonceau, Château de Chambord, Château de Cheverny, Vilandry, and Azey-le-Rideau. A trip to Orleans is very nice to examine the history of Joan of Arc. Also, there are no shortages of wineries to visit in the Loire Valley.



Normandy - I drove from Paris to Chartres, Rouen, Mt. St. Michel, Dinan, and Honfleur. From there I went to Bayeux from where I visited the Normandy Beaches and the American Cemetery. That visit literally changed my life. From there I drove up to Bruges in Belgium for a 2-day stay. I then flew home from Brussels. While in

Bayeux, be like the Queen of England or General Eisenhower and stay and eat at the Lion d'Or

Champagne Region – I took a day trip to Reims where I visited the “caves” of all the famous champagne makers like Mumm, Piper-Heidseck, Taittinger, etc. Usually open March-Sept.

Picardy – This region is north of Paris and not widely visited. However, it is beautiful country. This past May I visited Beauvais and the city of Amiens which was frequented by Jules Verne and has a very impressive cathedral. Quiet and sleepy. This was a one night trip and I enjoyed it very much although it was uneventful.

Giverny – The gardens and home of Monet. It can be visited in a day. Advice – get there early before the armada of tourist busses do. If you take the train, it arrives in Vernon, then take the short cab ride to Giverny. I describe visiting Giverny as being in a Monet painting as opposed to looking at one. Bring your camera to take photos of the gardens. Photography not permitted in the house. Closed Monday. Web site: <http://giverny.org/gardens/>

The Cathedral at Chartres – this is a day trip or can be visited on your way to Normandy or as a day trip via train. A beautiful cathedral. If you go, make sure you take the tour (in English) given by Malcolm Miller. It can be arranged at the cathedral although he does not give tours in the winter months.

Other Tips

When you use the Paris metro, you will ask yourself why the NYC subway can't be this good. From any metro station you can get to any other metro station in Paris, rarely with no more than one transfer. When you buy tickets, buy a “carnet” of 10 at a discounted price of about 10.50 euro. The metro closes around midnight on weeknights and about 1 a.m. on weekends. Watch out for pickpockets.

Take the bus. I especially like the #69 bus which passes through some of the most interesting areas of Paris. Busses use metro tickets to board. Web site for metro and bus: <http://www.ratp.fr/>

There are two commuter rail lines in Paris. The metro is like the NYC subway and the RER is like the Long Island Railroad and Metro North. From other train stations or “gares” you can access the TGV and other rail lines to other parts of the country and Europe.

Driving in Paris is challenging. From now on, when I want to drive outside of Paris, I like to take the train (train travel is wonderful in Europe) to a starting point like Tours if I am going to the Loire Valley for instance. I will rent a car from there to start my automobile journey. Gas and tolls can be expensive. Roads are generally good.

I very much like the Latin Quarter/St. Germain des Pres area along Blvd. St. Germain on the left bank. It is a very nice "neighborhood". It is very easy to get to Notre Dame area, Louvre, Orsay and many other attractions from here. The Buci Marketplace is nearby where there are some good breakfast places, supermarkets, wine shops, etc. Near the Odeon metro stop is a Starbucks (yes, Starbucks) where you can run into a lot of Americans to chat with. Generally, I stay away from Champs-Elysees. You may find it worth a visit but too much like Times Square for me, whereas the Latin Qtr/St. Germain is more like the East Village.

Make a color photocopy of your passport and keep it in a safe place. Better yet, scan the copy of the passport and e-mail it to yourself so you can get the copy in an emergency.

Paris is generally a very safe city. Take the normal precautions you would take when traveling anywhere else. However, you must watch out for pickpockets and scam artists. Unfortunately, Paris is full of them. They prey on tourists, especially the ones who look a little bit tired or disoriented, especially as they travel from the airport. I would advise you to keep your valuables in a safe place. Don't trust anyone who wants to give you something for free. Don't fall for the tricks where someone drops change on a bus or asks you to hold something for them. A trick I learned from my old days in Brooklyn: keep your wallet in your front pocket with a thick rubber band around it (ever try to pull a wallet out of your pocket with a thick rubber band around it?)

Where to Stay

As I said, I like staying in the Latin Quarter/St. Germain des Pres. The area near the Louvre near the Tuilleries gardens and along Rue de Rivoli and Rue Castiglione is nice if you have the money. Almost all Paris hotel rooms are smaller than American hotel rooms. And, not every hotel, even the better ones, have A/C. Paris hotels are government graded as:

- **No stars** – you don't want to stay here.
- **1 star** – probably no private bath. No A/C. You probably don't want to stay here either.
- **2 star** – the better ones have private baths and are clean and comfortable. An interior decorator has probably never seen the inside of these hotels. I found two very good 2 star hotels to stay in, but nothing you would visit on your 2nd honeymoon. Good ones have hair dryers, elevators, but maybe not A/C. Don't book a 2-star unless it comes recommended to you. 90-125 euro.
- **3 star** – small, charming hotels. Private bath. 125-200 euro. Usually a safe bet.
- **4 star** – good hotels. "Business class". 185-275 euro.
- **4 star luxe** – The Ritz, Meurice, Costes, Lotti, Intercontinental, etc. Some of the best luxury hotels in the world. 275-500 euro.

My picks:

Hotel du College de France – Basic, but a clean, comfortable and quiet 2 star hotel in the Latin Quarter. <http://www.hotel-collegedefrance.com/>. I have stayed here before and on my next trip, I am staying here again.

Hotel St. Pierre – in the Latin Quarter. 2-star. A very good location. I did not stay here personally but my friends did and I visited them here at the hotel. Also basic but it is a clean, comfortable and quiet. Great location. Next door to a GREAT bakery. <http://www.saintpierre-hotel.com/uk/index.html>

Hotel St. Jacques – A newly-renovated 2-star located in the Latin Quarter very close to the Parthenon. When I was there, the hotel was being renovated, so they may have raised their prices considerably but in any case, I recommend it. The movie “Charade” with Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn was shot here. Website: http://www.hotel-saintjacques.com/en/confort_en.htm

Hotel de Fleurie - a charming, romantic, and friendly 3-star hotel right off Blvd. St. Germain in the St. Germain des Pres area. I like this place a lot and I have met people who stay here every time they come to Paris. <http://www.fleurie-hotel-paris.com/>

Hotel Lutetia - a 4 star left bank hotel in a top location. Views of the Eiffel Tower. http://www.lutetia.com/anglais/index_f.htm

Hotel Mayfair – 4 star. I have visited friends while they stayed at this hotel. It is in a good location, it is clean, comfortable and it is priced right for a hotel of its class. It is often featured in travel packages offered by travel companies. It is located between the Place de la Concorde and the Place Vendome. Website: <http://www.paris-hotel-mayfair.com/>

Le Grande Intercontinental – a 4-star luxe hotel near the Opera Garnier. I loved it here when it was 1.12 euro to the dollar. Join their “club” and get upgraded rooms and use of their “club” floor. www.interconti.com

In a recent trip to Paris, I rented an apartment from via the Internet. I don't recommend this unless you know Paris well. You will not have the services of a concierge or even a desk attendant to ask the simplest of questions. If you are unfamiliar with the area where the apartment is located, you may find yourself in an undesirable neighborhood or in a noisy area. However, if you do rent an apartment, I would advise that you rent one that comes with a recommendation from someone who has stayed there. It is not uncommon for apartments to come without air conditioning or with portable heaters. Elevators might not be found in apartment buildings, especially older ones. When you rent an apartment, you are sending a deposit to someone you probably don't know, so a lot of trust is involved in this transaction. I also found that you can negotiate prices with the owner of the apartment. For instance, in February (off-season), I negotiated a rate 60% off the owner's asking price.

Resources

- I like the Frommer's travel guides. Another good one is *Paris for Dummies*. Rick Steves does a nice job with his guides also.
- www.tripadvisor.com – the best source anywhere for getting great info on any Paris topic. I will often plan a whole trip around the information I find on the message boards of this site. Excellent hotel recommendations. Use this for any trip you take anywhere. I cannot emphasize enough what a value this website is in planning a trip. Of particular value are the message board where you can ask just about any question and get an answer and the user reviews of hotels.
- www.ratp.fr – metro and bus maps
- Official tourist website: <http://english.pidf.com>
- My Paris Travel Album from 2004: <http://members.virtualtourist.com/m/tt/481e9/#TL>
- The New York Times keeps an archive of its excellent travel articles including neighborhood descriptions, restaurant, and hotel reviews. Registration may be required, but it's free. www.nytimes.com
- Here is a link to about 500 photos I have taken on my various trips to Paris: http://pg.photos.yahoo.com/ph/myfebparistrip/my_photos

CDG (Charles DeGaulle) Airport

The airport is drab, not well laid-out, and the food services are less than average.

I have never been checked by customs going into CDG. It takes about 20 minutes before the time you get off the plane to get through passport control, another 15-30 minutes or so to get your bags.

You have a few options to get into Paris from CDG. A cab runs about \$75. Shuttle vans about \$30 per person. The Roissybus is about 15 euro and takes you into the center of the city near the Opera Garnier where you then take another bus, taxi or metro to get to your hotel. Personally, I take the RER "B" train into the city to St. Michel then I take a metro (if necessary) to get to my hotel. To do so, at CDG, take the yellow "ADP" shuttle bus (free) to the "gare" (train station). Go downstairs and buy an RER "B" ticket at the visitor center where they speak English. The RER "B" train takes about 25 minutes to Paris and costs about 8-9 euro. You then need to get on the metro to your destination. If you have a lot of heavy bags, the RER might not be a good option.

Departing Paris for the U.S. involves checking your bags and going through security. The whole process takes about 40 minutes or less. I get to the airport 2 hours before departure.

Up until the last time I went to Paris, the ATM machines in the airport never worked or were out of money. ATM's in the city work fine. Make sure you have money in your checking account in order to use your bank card. Bring a back-up card in case of emergency.

Links

Le Musee des Arts et Metiers: <http://www.arts-et-metiers.net/>

Bouillon Chartier Restaurant: <http://www.restaurant-chartier.com/www/>

Cemeterie Pere Lachaise: <http://www.pere-lachaise.com/perelachaise.htm>

Notre Dame Cathedral: <http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/notre-dame/>

The Marais: <http://www.parislemarais.com/en/home.php>

Sacre Coeur: <http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/us/index.html>

St. Germain des Pres: <http://www.pariserve.tm.fr/English/paris/stger.htm>

Virtual Tourist: www.virtualtourist.com

Berthillon: <http://www.berthillon-glacier.fr/>

Musee Picasso: http://www.musee-picasso.fr/homes/home_id23982_u112.htm

Ile St. Louis: <http://ilestlouis.away.fr/index2.html>

Musee Marmottan: <http://www.marmottan.com/>

Paris Museum Pass: http://www.parismuseumpass.fr/flash/hp_en.html

Trip Advisor: <http://www.tripadvisor.com>

Heather Stimmler's Secrets of Paris: <http://www.secretsofparis.com/>