

Paris

Paris is confident that it's the world's most beautiful, fashionable and artistic capital. Visit just once and it's hard to disagree.

Walking through the heart of Paris you often feel like you've wandered onto an art film set; much of the city has been scrubbed clean in recent years and it's never looked more fabulous. Its inhabitants are the definition of **style**, its architecture includes some of the most spectacular buildings and monuments in Europe and the ambience is by turns exciting, alluring and effortlessly **romantic**.

France's capital city, Paris is quite distinctively divided into two parts by the Seine River, which meanders through the city, bisecting the centre. Thus everything in Paris is defined as *Rive Droite* (Right Bank) on the north side, or *Rive Gauche* (Left Bank) on the south side. Both sides compete with each other in great museums, churches, monuments, shops, hotels and restaurants, while in the middle of the river, atop the L'Île de la Cité, rises the towering bulk of Notre Dame cathedral, arbitrator between the two rivals.

But in truth this rivalry is only superficial. Paris is a whole unto itself, and Parisians are fiercely passionate about their home like nowhere else on earth. The city and its inhabitants have an independence born of fiercely fought revolution - not only political but also ideological. For centuries the city has attracted artists and philosophers, and within a day you can tread in the footsteps of such historical luminaries as Sartre, Voltaire, Hugo, Rousseau and Descartes - little wonder Paris is called the City of Lights.

The creative spontaneity that inspired these revolutionary minds is still running through the city and can be felt on the streets even today. Perhaps this is why Paris has its reputation for romance: nowhere else has such passion or feels quite so alive. Paris is a round-the-clock city and whatever the time of year or day you'll never be short of things to do. The city's tourist hotspots are famous the world over but in this vast metropolis there's a lot more to see than just these.

It's useful to know that central Paris is divided into 20 *arrondissements* or administrative quarters which spiral out from the centre. Most of the major tourist sites are in the lower number arrondissements, notably the first (1^{er}) to the eighth (8^e). Generally a place will state in which arrondissement you'll find it.

Hint:

If you want to see a number of monuments and museums on a short trip, think about buying a Paris Museum Pass, a card which allows you free entry to some 60 sites, and allows you to skip queues. The card can be bought at the museums that subscribe to the scheme, in many Métro and RER stations, FNAC ticket counters, or at tourist offices. Attractions included in the scheme are marked CMM below. For more details,

In Paris, Tel: +33 (0)8-9268-3000 .

The card costs: 2 days: EUR30

4 days: EUR45

6 days: EUR60

Excellent bus tours of the city with full multi-lingual commentary are provided by City Sightseeing using open-top vehicles. The starting point for the tours is the Eiffel Tower, with departures every 15 minutes in the summer. For more information and the opportunity to book this and other sightseeing tours online, visit the link below:

Eiffel Tower

One of the world's most famous monuments, *La Tour Eiffel* is an unmistakable feature of the Paris skyline. Designed by Gustav Eiffel for the 1889 World Fair, when completed the tower was the tallest building in the world at 300 metres. It is no exaggeration to say that the Eiffel Tower is the symbol not only of Paris but of the entire country. Although no longer the tallest structure in the world it still offers one of the best vantage points from which to get your bearings in the City of Lights. Take the lift all the way up to level three for some spectacular views across Paris.

Famously the construction was only intended to last the duration of the fair. However, over a century after its erection the tower is still as sturdy as ever. To avoid the queues come early in the morning - or visit at night when the tower is lit up with over 10,000 lights.

Champ de Mars, 7e. Open: daily 09h30-23h00. Admission: EUR12 to level three; EUR7.80 to level two; EUR4.80 to level one. Tel: +33 (0)1-4411-2323. Métro: Bir-Hakeim or RER Champ-de-Mars.

Arc de Triomphe

Located on the Rive Droite, almost directly north from the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe was intended to be a monument to Napoleon's military prowess, being commissioned by the Little Corporal in 1806. It has since been at the centre of much of Paris's history with both the German occupying army and the liberating Allied forces marching through it during World War Two.

The arc is also the focal point of state funeral processions with Napoleon himself and Victor Hugo being just two historical figures whose funeral corteges have travelled through the monument. From the top you can enjoy excellent views of Paris, particularly down the Grand Axe from the modern business centre of La Défense to the Champs-Élysées and the Louvre.

Place Charles de Gaulle, 8e. Open: 10h00-22h30 (Oct-Mar); 10h00-23h00 (Apr-Sep). Admission: EUR9, adults; free for children. Free to all on the first Sunday of each month Feb-May. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-5537-7377. Métro: Charles de Gaulle-Etoile.

Cruise

A great way to introduce yourself to Paris is to take a cruise along the Seine in one of the pleasure boats commonly known as *bateaux-mouches* or *vedettes*. The most popular points of departure for boats include the western tip of the Île de la Cité and the Pont de l'Alma close to the Eiffel Tower. Trips normally last an hour and run throughout the day except during flood periods. Expect to pay around EUR9. Dinner is available on some trips. Try any of the following cruise companies for various itineraries:

Les Vedettes du Pont-Neuf, Square du Vert-Galant, 1er. Tel: +33 (0)1-4633-9838. Métro: Pont-Neuf.

Bateaux Parisiens Tour Eiffel, Port de la Bourdonnais, 7e. Tel: +33 (0)1-4411-3344. Métro: Trocadéro.

Bateaux Vedettes de Paris, Port de Suffren, 7e. Tel: +33 (0)1-4418-1950. Métro: Bir-Hakeim.

Notre Dame

On L'île de la Cité in the middle of the Seine, the magnificent Gothic cathedral of Notre Dame has now been greatly restored to its former glory. You can generally only see a limited amount of the interior, but it is still well worth a visit to see the stunning rose windows in the nave. If you're Catholic, attending mass here is particularly uplifting. For a fee, you can climb to the top of Notre Dame's towers and gaze down at the city along with the gargoyles that perch atop its walls.

Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris. Place du Parvis Notre Dame, 4e. Open: daily 07h40-18h40. Admission: free to the nave. Free guided tours available in various languages. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4234-5610. Métro: Cité/St-Michel.

The Louvre

A colossal French royal château turned into the greatest art museum in the world, the Louvre is the most famous building on the Rive Droite of the Seine. The main entrance is via the mesmerising glass pyramid designed by IM Pei and opened in 1989. First-timers tend to go straight for Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa in the extensive Italian collections, and visitors sometimes forget that the gallery boasts a superlative array of French masterpieces, as well as phenomenal French and foreign sculpture galleries. As if that wasn't enough, the vast place also contains one of the largest collections of ancient treasures in the world, including staggering Egyptian artefacts brought to France after the Napoleonic campaigns.

Musée du Louvre. Palais du Louvre, 1er. Open: Wed-Mon 09h00-18h00 (until 21h45 Mon & Wed). Admission: EUR9, adults; free for children. Free to all visitors on the first Sunday of each month. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4020-5317. Métro: Palais-Royal-Musée du Louvre.

Sacre Coeur

With its many domes visible from afar across Paris, the white **Basilique du Sacré Coeur**, atop Montmartre, rises more like a fabulous oriental palace than a church. The place is magnetically kitsch inside and out, although the Benedictine nuns and their hymns create a suitably religious atmosphere each day of the week for mass. From in front of the basilica the views over Paris are exhilarating.

Beside the basilica is the lovely **Gothic church of St Pierre**, all that remains of the royal abbey of Montmartre which was destroyed during the Revolution.

35 Rue du Chevalier de la Barre, 18e. Open: daily 06h00-22h30. Admission: free to the cathedral and the crypt. Tel: +33 (0)1-5341-8909. Métro: Abbesses/Anvers.

Musee D'Orsay

The main challenger to the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay lies on the Rive Gauche of the Seine opposite the royal palace. This splendidly pompous building went up at the very end of the 19th century, having been designed by Victor Laloux as a railway station for the 1900 Paris World Fair. Saved from destruction in the 1970s, it was transformed into an **art museum**, taking up the story of French art where the Louvre leaves off, up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The magical works of Impressionists such as Monet, Renoir, Degas, Van Gogh, Cézanne and Pissarro are the highlights.

Rue de la Légion d'Honneur, 1. Open: Tue-Wed & Fri-Sat 09h30-18h00, Thu 10h00-21h45, Sun 09h00-18h00. Admission: EUR9.50, adults; free for children. Free to all visitors on the first Sunday of each month. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4049-4814. Métro: Solférino or RER Musée d'Orsay.

Pompidou Centre

Immodestly flaunting its plumbing on the outside and daubed in vulgarly bright colours, the bold and brash Centre Pompidou caused a sensation when it first opened. The main attraction for tourists is the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

Here you can saunter past splendid works by the leading modern painters who shook the art world between the 1900s and the 1960s. The emphasis is on French artists, or those who lived in France. Picasso, Braque, Matisse and the likes count among the stars.

If you like the works of art on show here the city of Paris also has its own separate top-class modern art collection in the Palais de Tokyo.

Centre Georges Pompidou, Place Georges Pompidou, 4e. Open: Wed-Mon 11h00-21h00. Admission: EUR12 (May 7 Aug 11); EUR12, adults (from Aug 11); free for children. Free to all visitors on the first Sunday of each month. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4478-1233. Métro: Hôtel de Ville/Rambuteau or RER Châtelet les Halle

The Cluny

Medieval art is celebrated at the Musée National du Moyen Age, better known simply as the Cluny. The settings in this ornate if over-restored Gothic house, built on the site of Roman baths, may be slightly old-fashioned. However, you can't help but admire the tapestries of the Lady and the Unicorn, the original statues of the Kings of Judah from Notre Dame's façade and some of the finest church treasures in Europe.

6 Place Paul Painlevé, 5e. Open: Wed-Mon 09h15-17h45 (opening times may vary). Admission: EUR7.50, adults; free for children. Free to all on the first Sunday of each month. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-5373-7816. Métro: Cluny-La Sorbonne or RER St-Michel

Picasso Museum

Picasso spent many years in France, including the war years, and the Musée Picasso (in the Marais quarter on the Rive Droite) is crammed with works by the Spanish exile. The amazingly diverse works demonstrate how the genius developed his unique style through different periods.

Musée National Picasso. Hôtel Salé, 5 Rue de Thorigny, 3e. Open: Wed-Mon 09h30-18h00 (Apr-Sept); 09h30-17h30 (Oct-Mar). Admission: EUR8.50, adults; free for children. Free to all on the first Sunday of each month. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4271-2521. Métro: St-Paul.

Conciergerie

Paris's revolutionary history is covered in the Conciergerie, the remnants of a medieval royal palace on l'Île de la Cité. The building doubled as an infamous prison during the bloody uprising and was the place of Marie Antoinette's incarceration - from where she was taken to the guillotine on October 16, 1793.

1 Blvd du Palais, 1er. Open: daily 09h30-18h00 (Mar-Oct); 09h00-17h00 (Nov-Feb). Admission: EUR6.50, adults; free for children. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-5340-6097. Métro: Cité/Châtelet.

Montmartre

The "Hill of the Martyrs", named after early Christians persecuted by the Romans, lies north of the city centre and is crowned by the magnificent Sacré Coeur. Montmartre became the haunt of countless artists in the 19th century and virtually everything in the area is devoted to their memory. The very pretty Place du Tertre is the heart of touristy Montmartre but beyond the square you can find seclusion from the crowds.

The nearby Espace Dali (Rue Poulbot, 18e. Tel: +33 (0)1-4264-4010) is filled with works by the surrealist Spanish artist, and not far off, in Rue Cortot, the Musée de Montmartre (12 Rue Cortot, 18e. Tel: +33 (0)1-4606-6111) proves an interesting local history museum. The village-like ambience of the area is heightened by a couple of old windmills, namely the Moulin de la Galette and the Moulin du Radet, and a patch of vineyard.

Paris Cemeteries

Amidst all its vibrant life Paris is home to quite possibly the most famous cemetery in the world. Père-Lachaise (Boulevard de Ménilmontant, 20e) has become a major attraction for admirers not just of Oscar Wilde and Jim Morrison, but also for those of major French cultural figures such as Molière, La Fontaine, Balzac and Victor Hugo.

Other cemeteries worth visiting in the city include the Cimetière du Montparnasse (3 Blvd Edgar Quinet, 14e) which can claim Baudelaire, Sartre and de Beauvoir among its inhabitants. Meanwhile the Cimetière de Montmartre (18e) is home to Stendhal, Berlioz, Dumas, Degas and Nijinsky (as in the dancer Vaslav, and not the racehorse).

Military Museum

The military history of the whole of France, not just Paris, takes up large parts of the massive *Les Invalides* complex.

As the name implies, these buildings were originally constructed as a hospital for the huge number of soldiers wounded in King Louis XIV's wars. The complex now houses the Musée de l'Armée, the Musée des Plans-Reliefs and the Musée de l'Ordre de la Libération.

France's proud military heritage is evident throughout, in an overwhelming wealth of paintings, engravings, uniforms and weapons. Of course Napoleon is well represented; displays include reconstructions of several of the Little Corporal's rooms, his death mask and one of his favourite horses, stuffed. Below the dome of Les Invalides's church lies Napoleon's elephantine tomb.

Hôtel National des Invalides. 129 Rue de Grenelle, 7e. Open: 10h00-18h00 (19h00 for Napoleon's tomb). Admission: EUR8, adults; free for children. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1(33)8-1011-3399. Métro: Invalides/Pont de l'Alma.

Pantheon

Soufflot originally built the enormous domed Panthéon on the Rive Gauche as a church for Louis XV. At the Revolution it was turned into a monumental temple to the memory of the great citizens of the French nation: Voltaire, Rousseau, Hugo, Zola and the Curies (Pierre and Marie), have all been given places among other famous French men and women through the ages.

Place du Panthéon, 5e. Open: daily 10h00-18h30 (summer), 10h00-18h00 (winter). Admission: EUR7.50, adults; free for children. CMM. Tel: +33 (0)1-4432-1804. Métro: Cardinal Lemoine or RER Luxembourg.

Views of Paris

The 196 metre-high summit of the Tour Montparnasse provides some of Paris's most impressive views. The building itself is nothing to look at (unless you have a soft spot for brutalist tower blocks) but take the super-fast lift to the 56th floor and you will be rewarded with a superb 360-degree vista of the city, taking in the Eiffel Tower, Sacré Coeur and all the other major landmarks.

Rue de l'Arrivée, 15e. Open: daily 09h30-23h00. Admission: EUR10, adults; EUR7, children. Tel: +33 (0)1-4538-5256. Métro: Montparnasse-Bienvenue.

More interesting architecturally, and almost as good in the view stakes, in the heart of the city's business district the ultra-modern Grande Arche de la Défense stands as a modern-day Arc de Triomphe. A panoramic glass lifts transport visitors 110 metres to the viewing floor at the top - for a perfect view along the full length of the Champs Elysée. Parvis de la Défense.

Open: 10h00-20h00. Admission: EUR10, adults; EUR8.50, children. Tel: +33 (0)1-4907-2727. Métro: Grande Arche de la Défense.

Best Areas

On the Right Bank (Rive Droite), the poshest areas for shops (as for hotels) are the 1er and 8e arrondissements, above the Louvre and the gardens of the Tuileries and Champs-Élysées. The beautiful Galerie Vivienne is just one of several delightful old-style shopping arcades which are a joy to explore. A couple of other fashionable arcades lie just south of the Place de la Madeleine. Many of the finest food stores are found in the 8e arrondissement. Foodies tend to head for Fauchon on Place de la Madeleine but nearby rival Hédiard is just as good; epicures should thoroughly explore both delicatessens. You'll also find many excellent specialist chocolate stores in the area.

The shops are trendier and quirkier in the Marais (4e) with clusters of specialist clothes and designer boutiques, together with many cutting-edge art galleries, notably around Place des Vosges. The Forum des Halles (1er), sandwiched between the Marais and the Palais-Royal quarters, offers more down-to-earth shopping pleasures; literally, as the stores are hidden below ground level in this lively mall.

On the Left Bank (Rive Gauche), the biggest density of luxury shops is to be found in the 6e and 7e arrondissements. The department store, Au Bon Marché, stretches either side of Rue du Bac, which marks the western frontier of major shopping territory on this side of the Seine. You should make time to check out the fabulous food hall, La Grande Epicerie, as well as the major fashion departments in the store.

For the really smart, individual boutiques, head for the streets around the church of St-Germain-des-Prés. Nowadays fashion beats religion hands down in this quarter and it's the trendy rather than the pious that walk the streets around the church. A few minutes' walk from St-Germain-des-Prés station, Rue de Rennes is a shoe lover's paradise, with a great choice of stylish shoe shops, some more affordable than others. Unsurprisingly, you'll find a plethora of art galleries showing works from very diverse trends in the streets around the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Reaching the Seine's Southern Quays, Quai Voltaire boasts a very upmarket and expensive array of fine art and antiques dealers. You'll also always find an array of the bouquinistes above the quays here with their green boxes of secondhand books, magazines and cards. A walk along the Southern Quays will take you to the Latin Quarter, traditionally linked with Paris intellectual life down the centuries, and a place where you'll find large numbers of bookshops as well as cheaper clothes stores catering to students.

Shopping

There are very few better shopping destinations in the world than Paris. It is a city where people come specifically to browse its shopping streets, which are filled with the finest merchandise available anywhere.

Department Stores

Galleries Lafayette is one of France's most famous names and an enduring symbol of French style and sophistication. A visit to the venerable Parisian flagship store is a must for any discerning shopper on a trip to the city.

Rival to Lafayette, fashionable Printemps on Boulevard Haussmann in the 9e arrondissement (just above the Opéra-Palais Garnier) occupies a particularly elegant building. The store first opened its doors in the 1870s; the 6th floor brasserie seems to hardly have changed since then. The fashionable garments for sale are definitely up to date however. Bon Marché (7e) is a slightly cheaper department store, good if you're looking for a bargain.

Markets

If you enjoy flea markets, head out to some of the so-called Portes or gateways to central Paris. The best-known of these is Les Puces de St-Ouen, held Saturday, Sunday and Monday at Porte de Clignancourt. Another favourite, Les Puces de Montreuil, is held on the same days at Porte de Montreuil.

As to food markets, there are particularly wonderful ones on the Rive Gauche. The Buci market in Saint Germain is excellent even on Sunday, and Mouffetard at the northern end of Rue Mouffetard is well worth checking out. There's a Marché Biologique or farmers' organic market on Boulevard Raspail (6e) on Sunday mornings.

Also worth a browse is the daily flower market near Notre Dame Cathedral.

Place Louis Lepine, Ile de la Cité (4e). Open: daily 08h00-19h00.

Getting Around

Métro and RER

Paris has a really excellent underground system, the Métro, supplemented by the RER stations in the centre, for which you can use a Métro ticket. The Métro operates between 05h30 and 01h30, the RER between 05h00 and midnight. Trains are extremely frequent. Métro stops tend to be close together, meaning that every attraction is only a short walk from one station or another.

If you're not likely to get your money's worth from a "Paris Visite" card (see above), the most sensible way to buy tickets for a short stay is by investing in a carnet of ten tickets for EUR11.40. Each ticket entitles you to one journey on any public transport in the city. On the Métro network you can change lines as often as you like on a single journey without using a new ticket.

It can be difficult to decipher the stations on the Métro map. As well as finding your station, you'll also need to remember the stations at the end of the line you want to use, as in the corridors you're directed not just by the line number, but also by the final destinations.

Buses

The Paris bus service is a bit harder to fathom than the Métro system but, if you're prepared to work it out, travelling at street level in Paris is a lot more rewarding than the underground. The city's buses run from around 07h00. Many services stop at 20h30, but some go on to 00h30. From then until dawn there are night buses (Noctambus) which run from 01h00 to 05h30 and radiate out from central Place Du Châtelet to the suburbs.

Get a free bus route map from a Métro station and buy your bus tickets there. Over a short stay the carnet of ten again offers good value for money - identical and interchangeable with those for the Métro. However, note that if you change bus on a single journey, you have to use a new ticket each time, unlike on a Métro journey. As you get on a bus, stamp your ticket in the machine next to the driver. To get the bus to stop where you want, press the *arrêt demandé* button.

Eurostar

A large number of visitors now arrive in Paris by the Eurostar train. This international train-link runs to London via the Channel Tunnel and to other destinations on the continent. Trains arrive at the Gare du Nord, located just to the north of the city centre. The station is also a hub for the Métro and RER networks, which connect to the city centre.

