



# Paris

Said to be the most romantic city on earth, Paris seduces its visitors with awe-inspiring culture and unrivalled cuisine. *Rufus Purdy* goes in search of the city's hidden gems

**STAY** Situated off the Champs-Élysées, a mere EU treaty's throw from Nicolas and Carla's presidential palace, **Hotel Keppler** (top right) is one of the city's most stylish stays. Designed by *roi d'intérieurs* Pierre Yves Rochon, its 39 rooms are a blend of striking artwork and statement furniture, and the rest of the hotel exudes Parisian chic. **Hotel Lumen** (bottom right), two streets away from the Louvre, is equally stylish. Its Art Deco interiors, which include a giant chandelier hanging above a polished black-and-white-tiled lobby floor, are as redolent of early 20th-century glamour as can be without setting sail for New York and hitting an iceberg.

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**SHOP** Anyone disembarking the Eurostar should head straight to **Ladurée** to pick up a box full of its exquisite, light-as-air macarons (above) – they're the perfect, brightly coloured accompaniment to that first café au lait in your hotel room. The legendary patisserie has outlets on the Champs-Élysées and rues Bonaparte and Royale. *Grand dames* and *gamines* alike adore **Colette** on the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a 'lifestyle boutique' that stocks everything from the latest fashions to the kind of accessories and homeware items that become must-haves as soon as you've laid eyes on them. The famous weekend flea market at **Porte de Clignancourt** (top) may not offer quite as many bargains as you might think, but a lazy wander through its stalls and units is a lovely way to spend a day. And you're bound to pick up something to adorn your wall, mantelpiece or wardrobe, too.



**KIDS** Paris may be beautiful, but don't forget that all the ecclesiastical **architecture** and **mime art** on the Métro will be as impenetrable as a Jean-Luc Godard film to those under 15. Alleviate tired legs and bored faces by taking your little ones out to **L'Aquarium de la Porte Dorée**, where the world's finest finned and flipped fauna – including sharks, piranhas and other less toothsome but equally impressive *poissons* – thrash, twist and turn in giant tanks. Closer to the city centre, the **Paris Plages** (right) provide Côte d'Azur-like beach space on the banks of the Seine for a four-week period in July and August each year. Relax in a deckchair while the children get on with the serious business of burying each other in the sand, pausing only to pester you for ice creams and pedalo rides.



**DRINK** There are few finer spots for an early evening drink than the terrace of the **Georges Bar** at the top of the **Pompidou Centre** (below). With gorgeous views out over the Seine to the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, as well as over the ramshackle rooftops of the Marais area, it's well worth braving the very Parisian (ie aloof and unsmiling) service for. When the weather's less than fine, dress up in your best Chanel and make for **Bar Hemingway** at the Ritz Hotel on the place Vendôme. Named after the writer for whom the bell finally tolled in 1961, it's a sumptuous, wood-paneled, den-like space, dotted with glass-and-mahogany tables and comfortable, sink-up-to-your-neck leather armchairs. Treat yourselves to a couple of 'Ritzinis' or 'Dirty Earl Grey Martinis', and give up all pretence of trying to escape their clutches.



**DINE** Buried halfway up a cobbled alley in the warren-like streets of the Latin Quarter, **Le Petit Prince de Paris** is as perfect a Parisian bistro as you could hope to find. It's dark and intimate for a start, and the predominantly French clientele kill time between courses by making seductive eyes at each other in the flattering candlelight. The main reason they come, though, is for the superb and inventive cooking (such as crème brûlée of Camembert with onion fondue and andouillette sausage) at incredibly affordable prices. **Au Virage Lepic**, a short uphill walk from the Moulin Rouge in Montmartre, is an equally good spot for easy-on-the-wallet traditional French cooking. Though the décor and background music may be camper than a boa-twirling Liberace – think Judy Garland posters and 1960s girl bands – the hearty, home-cooked dishes, which include baked bone marrow and cassoulet, are every bit as robust and macho as a Marseilles dockhand. For a quick lunch, head to Jewish deli **Chez Marianne** in the Marais, which serves up enormous platefuls of salt beef, falafel and kofte to an eclectic crowd of locals and students. It's well worth queuing for a table.



**ART/CULTURE** The **Louvre** and the **Pompidou Centre** may be among the most visited galleries in the world, but the city's lesser-known exhibition spaces are home to just as many delights. Take the Jean Nouvel-designed **L'Institut du Monde Arabe** (left), an ornate steel-and-glass building beside the Seine. The centre celebrates France's historic links with North Africa through displays of photography, decorative arts and calligraphy. It's also home to one of the city's best Moroccan restaurants. Another of Nouvel's modern buildings, the house-of-cards-like **Fondation Cartier**, is as central to France's contemporary art scene as it is to the district of Montparnasse in which it sits, and packs its floors with paintings, sculpture, installations and video shows by some of the world's most cutting-edge 20th- and 21st-century artists. It's also a very atmospheric venue for the regular evening concerts and performances.

**GETTING AROUND** By far the easiest way to get around Paris is by **Métro**. It may not be glamorous, but it's quick, efficient and cheap – single tickets to anywhere in the city cost just €1.60, and almost all of the computerised vending machines at stations have an English-speaking option. Far more atmospheric, though, are the city's riverboats, such as the **Bateaux-Mouches**, which set off every half an hour or so from the Port de la Conférence to plough up and down the Seine. Find a seat on the top deck and then sit back for an hour as you sail beneath Paris's beautiful medieval bridges, and tick off all those sights – Eiffel Tower, Place de la Concorde, Notre Dame, Louvre – that you were starting to feel guilty about failing to squeeze into your weekend. Although walking is a great way to experience the city, legs do get tired and feet can start to hurt. Far better to hire a **Segway personal transporter** from Fat Tire Bike Tours, and let the motorised wheels take the strain. **S**



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In a city that's so alive, it seems a little churlish to spend time among the dead, but **Père Lachaise Cemetery**, on the eastern fringes, is a must-visit. Not only is it stunningly beautiful in that gothic, Hammer Horror way – you can almost imagine the dry ice rolling between the ornate tombs – but it's also home to more world-famous figures than Boujis on a Saturday night. Balzac, Wilde, Piaf and Proust are all buried here, as is Doors frontman Jim Morrison, whose grave is permanently surrounded by earnest teenagers laying joints, Jack Daniels and terrible poetry at their idol's final resting place.



**...ART BY NIGHT**

Make sure you come to Paris in October for **Nuit Blanche** (White Night), a nocturnal street party in which the city is transformed into a living art installation that's a little bit Tate Modern, a little bit Glastonbury. Museums, galleries, concert halls, cinemas, restaurants and even swimming pools remain open all night. Around half a million people gather in the districts of the city to soak up the vibrant atmosphere.

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