

Understand Paris

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Paris' first-ever female mayor was elected in 2014. How will the city evolve under her watch?

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Timeless, yes, but a city that's changed dramatically over the centuries. This is its tale.

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No city has influenced world fashion more than the place where the little black dress was born.

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Music diversity (French jazz, Afro-pop, Algerian *rai*) abounds in Paris.

Paris Today

While the elegance, depth and extraordinary spirit of the Paris of Haussmann, Hugo and Toulouse-Lautrec will never disappear, Europe's mythical 'City of Light' is on the brink of redefinition, with a long-awaited expansion into the suburbs beginning to take shape. Parisians themselves, moreover, are in the mood for change: the 2014 municipal elections ushered in the city's first-ever female mayor.

Best on Film

Les 400 Coups (400 Blows; 1959) Moving portrayal of the magic and disillusionment of childhood.

La Haine (Hate; 1995) Mathieu Kassovitz's prescient take on social tensions in modern Paris.

Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain (Amélie; 2001) Endearing story of a winsome young Parisian.

La Môme (La Vie en Rose; 2007) Édith Piaf, from street urchin to international superstar.

Hugo (2011) A tribute to cinema and the legendary Georges Méliès.

Best in Print

Notre Dame de Paris (Victor Hugo; 1831) The classic tale of the hunchback of Notre Dame.

A Moveable Feast (Ernest Hemingway; 1964) Memoirs of the aspiring writer's life in Paris.

Paris to the Moon (Adam Gopnick; 2000) Illuminating essays from the *New Yorker* correspondent.

The Elegance of the Hedgehog (Muriel Barbery; 2008) French best-seller that unveils the world behind a Parisian façade.

Parisians: An Adventure History of Paris (Robb Graham; 2010) Both history tome and unexpected page turner, filled with little-known gems.

Madame la Maire

Paris has a history of political subversiveness, and while it's no longer the radical hotbed it once was, it continues to reveal an independent streak that runs counter to nationwide sentiment. This was most recently on display during the April 2014 municipal elections. While the vast majority of the country swung decisively to the right – political payback for President François Hollande's seemingly ineffectual policies – the capital remained resolutely left. But the big story was not that Parisians stuck with the eco-leaning Socialists for a third straight term, but rather that the election's two leading candidates were women: the Spanish-born deputy mayor Anne Hidalgo, and the former minister of ecology, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet. Hidalgo won with a substantial 55% of the vote, becoming the first-ever female mayor of Paris.

Greater Paris

Most visitors to Paris – and, in fact, many French – continue to think of the city as a self-contained whole, with limits that are both physically and conceptually defined by the traffic-snarled boulevard Périphérique – the ring road that stands on the site of the former city walls. This vision, however, is a far cry from reality: the vast majority of Parisians (8.2 million) now live in the adjacent suburbs, compared with only 2.2 million residents who live in the city proper. The steadily growing suburban population – indeed, the real-estate boom of the past decade has pushed most middle-class residents and large companies outside the Périphérique – has created a real need to redefine Paris, on both an administrative and infrastructural scale.

Enter the Grand Paris (Greater Paris) redevelopment project, a Sarkozy-era initiative. The crux of Grand Paris is a massive decentralised metro expansion, with