

NEIGHBOURHOODS

top picks

- Centre Pompidou (p78)
- Ste-Chapelle (p97)
- Musée du Louvre (p70)
- Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris (p81)
- Eiffel Tower (p116)
- Cimetière du Père Lachaise (p155)
- Musée Rodin (p111)
- Musée de l'Orangerie (p77)
- Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (p116)
- Jardin du Luxembourg (p106)

NEIGHBOURHOODS

Paris is a compact, easily negotiated city. Twenty arrondissements (city districts) spiral clockwise from the centre and are important locators; their numbers are always included in addresses.

Each of Paris' arrondissements has a distinct personality. The 1er has plenty of sights but few residents, the 5e is studenty, the 7e full of ministries and embassies; the 10e was traditionally working-class but is now a trendy district in which to live, while the 16e is a bastion of the well-heeled. But the profiles are not always so cut and dried; the lay of the land becomes much clearer to visitors when they see the city as composed of named *quartiers* (quarters or neighbourhoods).

The mother of all museums is in the neighbourhood we call Louvre & Les Halles; if you are looking for Paris framed or under glass this is the district for you. Here you'll also find Les Arts Décoratifs devoted to applied arts, design and advertising; the Musée de Orangerie with its sublime impressionist collection; and the original bad boy of exhibition spaces, the Centre Pompidou.

For history and architecture on a grand scale, the Île de la Cité is your compass point, with Notre Dame, the Conciergerie and Ste-Chapelle all standing virtually side by side. For romance, though, cross the bridge east to Île de St-Louis or even south to the Latin Quarter. The students may be moving on to other quartiers and arrondissements, but intellectuals continue to pontificate in the cafés of the Quartier Latin and *les avante-gardistes* are still in control of the galleries and watering holes of the neighbouring St-Germain district.

There is no Paris without the Eiffel Tower, the most iconic of city icons, but the Champs-Élysées, with its landmark Arc de Triomphe at one end and the epic-proportioned place de la Concorde at the other, is a close second (though the offerings on the *boulevard* itself are now somewhat limited). Fans of *haute couture* should make the so-called Golden Triangle just south of the Champs-Élysées their prime destination. Those of more modest means but still with that urge to shop will head for the *grands magazines* (department stores) of the Grands Boulevards. And with its beautiful, Haussmann-era buildings, this district is for many visitors a reflection of the way they think Paris should look architecturally.

In search of the Paris of Central Casting, where everyone paints, wears a beret and sings to accordion music? Head up to Montmartre, the Paris of myth and films. Contiguous is Pigalle, the naughty red-light district that today looks pretty tame.

Party animals should set their sights on the Marais, Ménilmontant and/or Bastille; this is where Paris pulsates after dark. It's not a, err, hard-and-fast rule but to simplify, let's just say that the Marais is the playground of gays and lesbians, Ménilmontant offers what used to be called an alternative scene elsewhere (and still is here) and Bastille is today's *quartier* for some of the best music – be it live, canned or whistled in the metro – in town.

That's a claim to fame Montparnasse used to be able to make. But the brasseries and bistros where writers like Ernest Hemingway and F Scott Fitzgerald both worked and partied are now rather pricey eating establishments that attract foreigners and *les faubourgeois* (suburbanites) all in search of their own private Paris moment. For a taste – both sensual and metaphysical – of the Paris of today, head eastward to Chinatown. It's colourful, it's multiracial and it all tastes as good as it always did.