

Paris



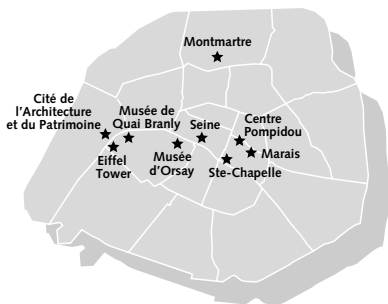
Paris has all but exhausted the superlatives that can reasonably be applied to any city. Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower have been described countless times, as have the Seine and the differences between the Left and Right Banks. But what writers have been unable to capture is the grandness and the magic of strolling along the city's broad avenues, which lead from impressive public buildings and exceptional museums to parks, gardens and esplanades.

With more famous landmarks than any other city in the world, the French capital evokes all sorts of expectations for first-time visitors: of grand vistas, of intellectuals discussing weighty matters in cafés, of romance along the Seine, of naughty nightclub revues, of rude people who won't speak English. If you look hard enough, you can probably find all of those. But another approach is to set aside the preconceptions of Paris that are so much a part of English-speaking culture, and to explore the city's avenues and backstreets as though the tip of the Eiffel Tower or the spire of Notre Dame weren't about to pop into view at any moment.

You'll soon discover (as so many others before you have) that Paris is enchanting almost everywhere, at any time, even 'in the summer, when it sizzles' and 'in the winter, when it drizzles', as Cole Porter put it. And you'll be back. Trust us.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Introduce yourself to one of Paris' new museums: the architecturally stunning (and content-rich) **Musée du Quai Branly** (p152) or the **Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine** (p152)
- Be stunned (and inspired) by the veritable wall of sublime stained glass in **Ste-Chapelle** (p145), one of the most beautiful houses of worship in Christendom
- Check out the stately *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions) in the **Marais** (p142) by day and the district's throbbing bars and clubs after dark
- Enjoy the collections and the spectacular rooftop views at the **Centre Pompidou** (p138), the world's most successful art and culture centre
- Marvel at the incomparable collection of Impressionist and post-Impressionist art at the waterfront **Musée d'Orsay** (p151)
- Enjoy the views of the timeless **Seine** (p163) from the banks or on an evening cruise
- Go not to the top but the bottom of the **Eiffel Tower** (p152) and look up for a new take on the landmark that's more Parisian than Paris itself
- Relive the *oh-là-là* Paris of cancan and windmills on a walking tour of **Montmartre** (p161)



■ POPULATION: 2.177 MILLION

■ AREA: 105 SQ KM

HISTORY

In the 3rd century BC a tribe of Celtic Gauls known as the Parisii settled on what is now the Île de la Cité. Centuries of conflict between the Gauls and Romans ended in 52 BC, when Julius Caesar's legions crushed a Celtic revolt led by Vercingétorix. Christianity was introduced in the 2nd century AD, but Roman rule ended in the 5th century with the arrival of the Germanic Franks. In 508 Frankish king Clovis I united Gaul as a kingdom and made Paris his seat.

In the 9th century France was beset by Scandinavian Vikings, who raided the western coastal areas; within three centuries these 'Norsemen' (later known as Normans) started pushing towards Paris, which had risen so rapidly in importance that construction had begun on the cathedral of Notre Dame in the 12th century, the Louvre was built as a riverside fortress around 1200, the beautiful Ste-Chapelle was consecrated in 1248 and the Sorbonne opened its doors in 1253.

The incursions heralded the Hundred Years' War between Norman England and the Capetian rulers in Paris, eventually bringing the French defeat at Agincourt in 1415 and English control of the capital in 1420. In 1429 the 17-year-old Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) rallied the French troops to defeat the English at Orléans. With the exception of Calais, the English were finally driven out of France in 1453.

The Renaissance helped Paris get back on its feet at the end of the 15th century, and many of the city's most famous buildings and monuments were erected at this time. But in less than a century Paris was again in turmoil, as clashes between Huguenot (Protestant) and Catholic groups increased. The worst such incident was the so-called St Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, in which 3000 Huguenots who had gathered in Paris to celebrate the wedding of Henri of Navarre (later King Henri IV) were slaughtered.

Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King, ascended the throne in 1643 at the age of five and ruled until 1715, virtually emptying the national coffers with his ambitious building and battling. His greatest legacy is the palace at Versailles, 21km southwest of Paris. The excesses of Louis XVI and his queen, Marie-Antoinette, in part led to an uprising of Parisians on 14 July 1789 and

the storming of the Bastille prison – kick-starting the French Revolution.

At first the Revolution was in the hands of moderates, but within a few years the so-called Reign of Terror, during which even the original patriots were guillotined, was in full swing. The unstable post-Revolutionary government was consolidated in 1799 under a young Corsican general named Napoleon Bonaparte, who declared himself First Consul. In 1804 he had the Pope crown him 'Emperor of the French' at Notre Dame and then went forward and conquered most of Europe. Napoleon's ambitions eventually brought about his defeat, first in Russia in 1812 and later at Waterloo in Belgium in 1815. He was exiled to a remote South Atlantic island, where he died in 1821.

France struggled under a string of mostly inept rulers until a coup d'état in 1851 brought Emperor Napoleon III to power. He oversaw the construction of a more modern Paris, with wide boulevards, sculpted parks and – not insignificant – a modern sewer system. Like his pugnacious uncle, however, Napoleon had a taste for blood, which led to his costly and unsuccessful war with Prussia in 1870. When the masses in Paris heard of their emperor's capture by the enemy, they took to the streets, demanding that a republic be declared. Despite its bloody beginnings, the Third Republic ushered in the glittering and very creative period known as the *belle époque* (beautiful age), celebrated for its graceful art-nouveau architecture and advances in the arts and sciences.

The defeat of Austria-Hungary and Germany in WWI, which regained Alsace and Lorraine for France (lost to Prussia in the previous century), was achieved at an unimaginable human cost; with 20% of all French males aged between 20 and 45 years killed. By the 1930s, however, Paris had become a centre for the artistic avant-garde and had established its reputation among freethinking intellectuals. This was all cut short by the Nazi occupation of 1940; Paris would remain under direct German rule until 25 August 1944.

After the war, Paris regained its position as a creative centre and nurtured a revitalised liberalism that reached a climax in the student-led uprisings of 1968. The Sorbonne was occupied, barricades were set up in the Latin Quarter and some nine million people nationwide were inspired to join in a general