

## Chapter 1

# Discovering the Best of Paris

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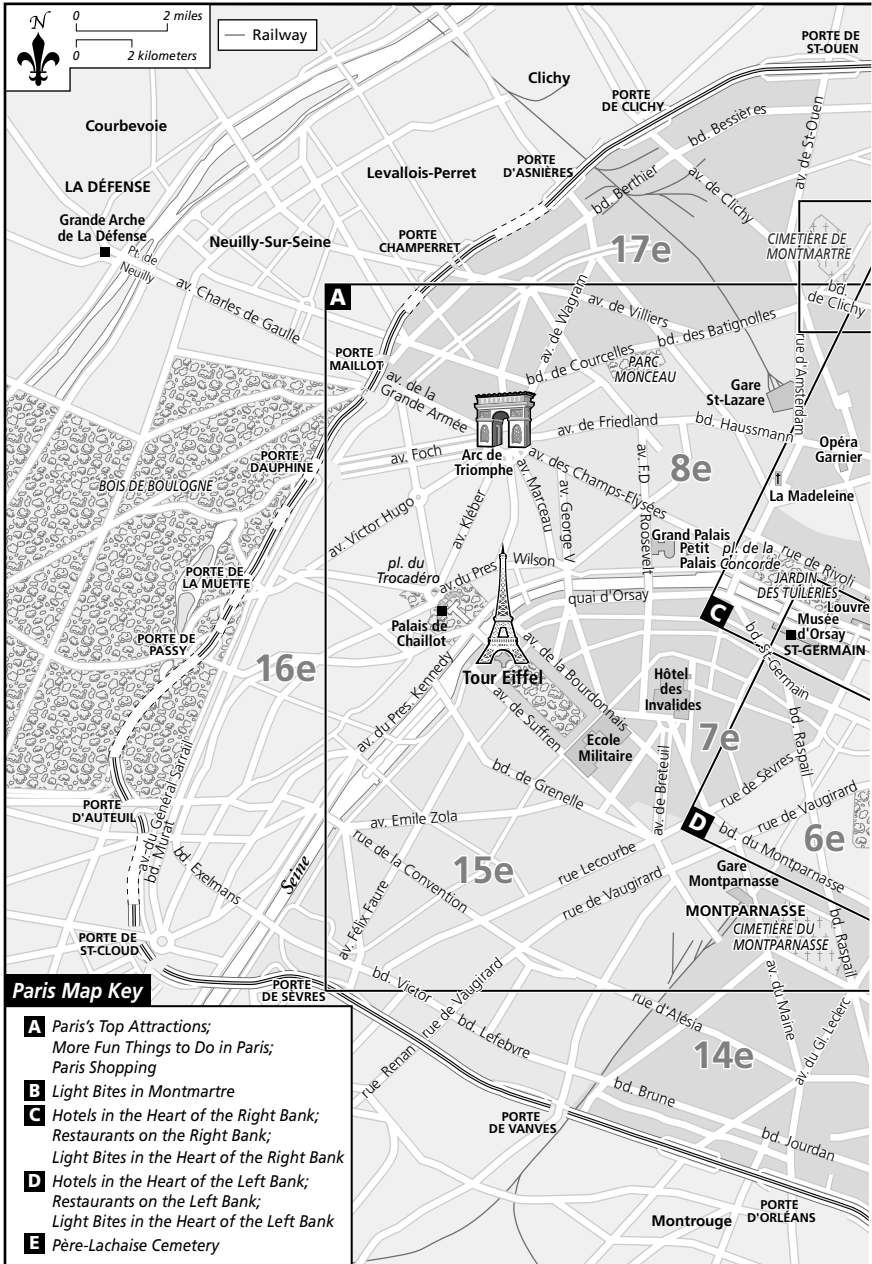
### *In This Chapter*

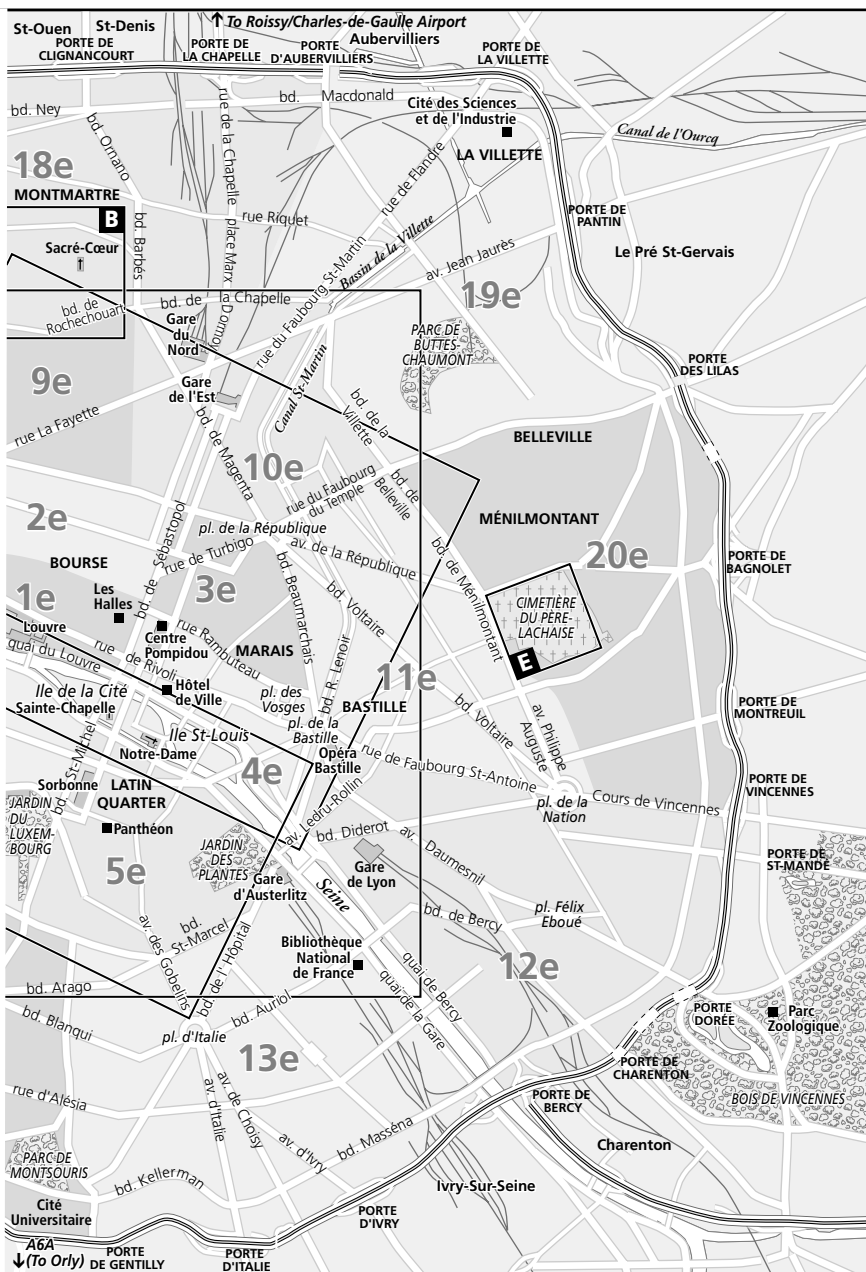
- ▶ Paris's best sights
  - ▶ Paris's best accommodations for every price range
  - ▶ Food, glorious food, the best bars, a shopping nirvana, and the best culture, parks, and gardens
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**T**he euro is devastating the dollar. Gas prices have never been so high. Airlines are charging for checked baggage. Planning a trip anywhere during these times may seem like an unaffordable luxury, and to Paris of all places — well, you may be hearing from all fronts how expensive it is. I'm here to tell you that, though prices are higher than they are at home, you don't have to break the bank to visit. *Paris For Dummies* is designed to give you an overview of all types of hotels, restaurants, and shopping in all price ranges. But I include tips, too, on how to save — and let you know when spending more is justified.

So, go ahead and visit one of the world's most beautiful and celebrated cities with what could be one of the best attractions of all — a way of life in which relaxing in a cafe and watching the world go by are natural parts of the day. Where you can, build into your itinerary time to linger and get lost — getting lost, after all, costs nothing. Discovering a tiny shop instead of a subway station or a pretty park around a bend can be more fun than a planned trip to a famous monument. And as for those famous monuments and museums: Yes, you'll discover that the **Louvre** is as incredible as its reputation, but did you know that the **Musée du quai Branly** has opened up near the Eiffel Tower and displays some of the Louvre's former treasures? And what a great time to visit — the **Orangerie**, closed for nearly a decade, has reopened, and Monet's *Water Lilies* here are spectacular! You'll find that taking a **motorboat tour of the Seine** is one of the best ways to see Paris, but why not rent a rowboat in the **Bois de Boulogne** and the **Bois de Vincennes**, two big, beautiful parks on each side of Paris that are a haven from the city's bustle? Whatever you do, you'll quickly discover that Paris (see map "Paris at a Glance") is more of an experience than merely a city, and each visitor experiences it in an entirely individual way.

## Paris at a Glance







This chapter is designed as an at-a-glance reference to the absolute best — the best of the best in my opinion — that Paris has to offer. Each of these experiences and places is discussed in detail later in the book; you can find them in their indicated chapter, marked with a Best of the Best icon.

## The Best Accommodations

With more than 2,200 chain hotels, deluxe palacelike accommodations, hotels that cater to business travelers, budget hotels, and mom-and-pop establishments, it's difficult to narrow things down to just a few. But the hotels here are the hotels that, in my opinion, you'll want to return to on your next visit (because no one can see Paris just once!). **I only list hotels in the first eight arrondissements, the most central locations in Paris.** See Chapter 9 for more information on the accommodations listed here.

- ✓ I love the **Hôtel de l'Abbaye Saint-Germain** (6e), a former convent on the Left Bank that is simply charming, with five-star service and beautiful tranquil surroundings. Rooftop suites and some first-floor rooms open onto vine-covered terraces, and the fabulous duplex apartment is terrific for honeymooners.
- ✓ In a city where accommodations range from the ultra-luxurious to the barely inhabitable, **Hôtel Verneuil** (7e) offers the elegance of a small boutique hotel at a reasonable price located just a short walk from St-Germain-des-Prés, the Louvre, the Musée D'Orsay, and the Seine.
- ✓ The impressive, airy **Hôtel du Jeu de Paume** on the exclusive Ile St-Louis was once a 17th century *jeu de paume* (the precursor to tennis) court, and you can still see the wooden skeleton rising from the open lobby. This is one of Paris's more unusual hotels, successfully combining sumptuous ancient and modern décor, and guests have their choice of staying in rooms or, for more than five days, private apartments. It's located right down the street from Notre-Dame and Left and Right Bank bridges.

## The Best Food

No matter where you decide to dine or what kind of food you choose, you can count on having some of the most memorable meals of your life in Paris! The following list contains some of my favorite restaurants (the information in parentheses indicates the arrondissement in which each establishment is located). See Chapter 10 for more information on the restaurants listed here.

- ✓ **Le Cinq (8e):** Ah, to be able to dine here daily! This multi-Michelin-starred restaurant in the Four Seasons George V is truly extraordinary, from exquisite pull-out-all-the-stops food to its award winning sommelier and fantastic wine cellar. If you want a once-in-a-lifetime dining experience, you won't be disappointed.

- ✔ **Le 404 (3e):** You may join staff and patrons dancing on the bar at the end of your dinner at this hip and fun Moroccan restaurant not far from the heart of the Marais. You'll be talking to your neighbors over tasty *tajines*, couscous, and *pastilla* and toasting to new friendships with a crisp regional wine.
- ✔ **Le Potager du Marais (3e):** Vegetarians, rejoice! This tiny restaurant near the Centre Pompidou serves delicious French and other standards that happen to be meatless (there are also some options for vegans). Diners sit at a long communal table and the place is always packed (reservations for dinner are strongly suggested); there's such a friendly vibe, you almost won't be able to help talking to others around you.

## The Best Sights

What's a visit to Paris without seeing the view from the Eiffel Tower (even though there are other great views that incorporate the famous landmark)? For most people, the real reason for visiting Paris is to see the quintessentially French attractions for which the city is known. Are the sights really as great as returning travelers say? *Mais oui!* Here are just a few of the best. See Chapter 11 for more information on the sights listed here.

- ✔ You can't miss the city's most famous landmark, the **Eiffel Tower**, which graces the city skyline with its lacy presence. At night for ten minutes each hour until it closes, the tower bursts into glittering light from 30,000 bulbs. Mail your postcards and letters from the tower's very own post office located the first level up; they'll get a special Tour Eiffel postmark.
- ✔ Take a **tour boat down the Seine** at night and see lights from bridges older than the United States cast reflections in the water. English-language commentary is included. (Even better: Take one of Fat Tire Bike's night bike tours around the city. Included in the price is a Seine boat ride.)
- ✔ The **Musée d'Orsay**, a former train station, has an unsurpassed collection of Impressionist masterpieces and beautiful displays of Art Nouveau furnishings. Much less overwhelming than the Louvre and well-located near the Seine and Eiffel Tower, this museum should make everyone's top five!
- ✔ Your first glimpse of the nearly 900-year-old **Cathédral de Notre-Dame** just may take your breath away. Flying buttresses lend a graceful air to what would otherwise be an imposing structure. Play Quasimodo and climb to the top of the bell tower (get there early — the lines grow huge from late morning through closing, especially in summer) or marvel at the gorgeous rose windows.
- ✔ The **Arc de Triomphe** was commissioned by Napoléon to honor his army and its 128 victorious battles, but the real reason people visit is for the view — one that takes in the Eiffel Tower. From the top,

49m (162 ft.) up, you can see in a straight line the Champs-Élysées, the obelisk in the place de la Concorde, the Louvre, and the Grande Arche de la Défense in St-Denis, a giant open cube built to be the modern equivalent to this arch.

- ✔ The **Musée Picasso** constantly rotates its exhibits that represent every phase of Picasso's prolific 75-year career. All of it is housed in a beautiful 17th-century mansion deep in the Marais, one of Paris's best and most interesting neighborhoods.
- ✔ The **Musée Nationale d'Auguste Rodin** is one of Paris's more relaxing museums. There are only 16 medium-sized rooms here, and after taking in the sensual sculptures, you can stroll through the gardens here to see more of the legendary artist's masterpieces such as *The Thinker* and *The Gates of Hell*.
- ✔ The **Musée de Cluny** is one of the jewels of Paris museums and is home to the famous tapestry series *The Lady and the Unicorn*. It houses ancient Roman hot and cold baths, the original statues pulled off Notre-Dame in 1790 by furious revolutionaries, and so, so much more, as well as a terrific gift shop to boot.

## The Best Parks and Gardens

Paris has parks for every taste and interest offering flowers, rare plants, and views of the city and puppet shows, pony rides, and museums. Here are some of its best. Chapter 11 has more information.

- ✔ The **Jardin des Tuileries** (1er) is Paris's most visited park, where visitors to the Louvre next door like to revive in the fresh air and rest their feet on conveniently placed wrought-iron chairs surrounding the garden's fountains. In keeping with the French style of parks, trees are planted according to an orderly design and the sandy paths are arrow straight. During the summer, a carnival features an enormous Ferris wheel (with great views of the city) and some other thrill rides, a fun house, arcade-style games, and snacks.
- ✔ The **Jardin du Luxembourg** in the Latin Quarter is Parisians' most beloved park. Children love it for its playground, pony rides, puppet theater, and the Fontaine de Médicis where they can sail toy boats. Make use of the tennis and *boules* courts (*boules* is a French game similar to lawn bowling or the Italian *bocce* in which players try to be the first to roll their balls closest to the small object ball called the *cochonnet*), or appreciate the art exhibited on the wrought-iron fence at the garden's northwestern entrance near boulevard St-Michel and rue de Médicis. Courses are offered here in bee keeping, and the park's orchard grows apples and pears that end up on the plates of staff at the French Senate, which is housed in the garden's Palais du Luxembourg.
- ✔ **Parc de la Villette** (19e) is a modern park with a series of theme gardens, including an exotic bamboo garden and one featuring

steam and water jets. Scattered throughout are playgrounds and other attractions — this is a must-visit if you've spent time at the huge children's science complex, **Cité des Sciences et l'Industrie**.

- ✓ Rock formations and grottoes in the tranquil **Parc de Belleville** (20e) are still around from the days when the hill was a strategic point for fighting Attila the Hun. Watch the sun set over western Paris and take in the wonderful (free!) views of the city. Topped by the **Maison de l'Air**, a museum with displays devoted to the air that we breathe, you can enjoy fountains, a children's play area, and an open-air theater that holds rock concerts during the summer.

## The Best Shopping

Though the city has a well-deserved reputation as a bastion of over-the-top luxury (to understand why, head for the 8th arrondissement), discount, resale, and overstock stores also abound, as well as the wonderful Monoprix (see below). Whenever I'm in Paris, a visit to the following stores is a must. See Chapter 12 for more information on the stores listed here.

- ✓ **Monoprix**, a reasonably priced department store with branches around the city, has stylish clothing and is also great for accessories, low-priced cosmetics, lingerie, and house wares. Many locations also have large grocery stores good for gift buying. The one at 52 av. du Champs-Élysées, 8e, is chock-full of goodies and open until midnight.
- ✓ **Le Bon Marché** (6e) is elegant, but small enough to be manageable, and is the Left Bank's only department store. You can find the top designers here, as well as more affordable pieces, too, and the basement toy store has great gift selections. The third floor is particularly renowned for its large shoe selection and lingerie department (where dressing rooms have phones to summon your salesperson).
- ✓ Although it isn't cheap, Le Bon Marché's next-door grocery store, **Le Grand Épicerie** (6e) is one of the best luxury supermarkets in Paris and a great place to look for gourmet gifts such as olive oils, homemade chocolates, or wine. It makes for wonderful one-stop picnic shopping, too, offering a wide array of prepared foods and cheeses. If you're staying in an apartment or your hotel has a kitchen for guests, come here to purchase fixings for dinner.

## The Best of Culture

Getting “cultured” is not a problem in Paris. There are more than 100 theaters, competing opera houses, and ballet and chamber music concerts in many churches. Even if your French is rusty or not up to par, many avant-garde productions and English-language theaters serve as alternatives to French-language plays. In this section, I list some of the

best places to see theater, watch a ballet, or hear a symphony. See Chapter 15 for more information.

- ✔ You can see dazzling performances by the national opera and ballet troupes that perform at both the radiant **Palais Garnier** (9e) and the ultramodern **Opéra National de Bastille** (11e). The Palais Garnier conducts more ballet performances, and the Opéra Bastille puts on more opera.
- ✔ A good mix of modern and classic tragedies and comedies comes alive in wonderful performances in the **Salle Richelieu** of the **Comédie-Française**, 2 rue de Richelieu, 1er.
- ✔ For popular, contemporary plays, the **Théâtre National de Chaillot**, place du Trocadéro, 16e, is your place.
- ✔ Whatever your choice of the classic arts — opera, ballet, concerts, recitals — you'll find it performed at the **Châtelet, Théâtre Musical de Paris** (1er) by local and international performers of the highest caliber.
- ✔ More than a dozen Parisian churches regularly schedule relatively inexpensive organ recitals and concerts. The most glorious, where the music is nearly outdone by the glorious stained glass windows, is **Sainte-Chapelle** (4e).

## The Best Clubs

Each neighborhood makes a different contribution to Paris's vibrant nightlife scene. Listed here are some of the best places to dance the night away. See Chapter 16 for more information.

- ✔ **Barrio Latino** (11e) has three bars on four floors, private areas where you can see (but not be seen), a second floor restaurant serving Latino food, a top-floor private club with a kitschy Che Guevara mural, and energetic Latin music that sets everyone to dancing. It's pure fun!
- ✔ **Batofar** (13e), an Irish light ship docked right in the Seine, is one hot, sweaty, and ultimately fun time right on the Seine, with all types of music represented, from drum-and-bass to British pop.
- ✔ Where else in Paris will you dance to the Hives and the Cure followed by some electro-pop spun by great DJs (and down some great beer, too)? It's at the unassuming **Le Truskel** (2e), an Irish pub with a basement "microclub" that has been drawing in crowds of 20-somethings since it opened in 2002.
- ✔ **Le Mix** (15e) boasts spinning provided by music gurus Ministry of Sound and David Guetta (a holy name among clubbers).