A PERFECT DAY



8.00am

Breakfast

If your hotel doesn't serve breakfast, ask the concierge for directions to the nearest good *boulangerie*; buy some freshly-baked croissants or *pains au chocolat* and find a leafy square nearby to eat them in.



9.00am

Seine boat tour

Begin at the city's origin, the River Seine. Make your way to the western tip of the Île de la Cité, via the steps down from Pont-Neuf. From here, take one of the Vedettes du Pont-Neuf boat tours; it is a lovely way to see the city.



11.00am

Coffee break

At the Palais du Luxembourg, turn left and walk along the railings of the famous Jardin du Luxembourg, the most elegant of Paris parks. Stop for a strong espresso at smart café Le Rostand (see page 114), on the square at the garden's eastern tip.



10.30am

Rue de Seine

From Pont-Neuf, walk along quai de Conti, then amble down characterful rue de Seine with its art and fashion boutiques.



12 noon

Park and lunch

After a stroll through the Jardin du Luxembourg among joggers, *boules* players and smooching couples, make your way to nearby restaurant La Ferrandaise (see page 114) and enjoy a nice light lunch of updated French classics.



4.30pm

Retail therapy

Make your way back to Métro St-Paul and go straight to Charles-de-Gaulle-Étoile station. Take a moment outside the station to admire the Arc de Triomphe (see page 57), then walk down the Champs-Élysées, dipping into the swanky, big-brand shops as you go.



2.00pm

Paris history

Walk towards the river along teeming boulevard St-Michel, then catch the Métro to St-Paul. Walk up rue Malher to the Musée Carnavalet (see page 51) and spend an hour or two exploring Paris' history through the paintings and artefacts.



6.00pm

Montmartre and dinner

Take the Métro to Abbesses, on the hill of Montmartre. Follow your nose through the atmospheric, winding streets. After a relaxed bistro dinner at Chez Toinette (see page 112), walk to Sacré-Cœur and savour the panoramic view over the city from its front steps.



9.30pm

Bar hopping

Walk downhill to boulevard de Roche-chouart and take a taxi to the République and Oberkampf area, which is littered with trendy bars. Try rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, which runs parallel to rue Oberkampf, just east of place de la République – the perfect counterpoint to the historic attractions you saw earlier.







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INTRODUCTION

It's hard to argue with Victor Hugo's description of Paris as 'the city of cities'. For over 2,000 years, it has steadily grown in size and reputation, and each of its many layers is rich in history and intrigue. Unlike many European cities, it was left almost unscathed by the two world wars, and its celebrated streets, monuments and museums still work their centuries-old magic today. And then there's the artistic heritage of the 'City of Light'; long a powerhouse of art, literature, music and philosophy. Little wonder that the Parisians are so proud to be part of a city that, according to writer Jean Giraudoux, has been home to 'the greatest amount of thinking, talking and writing in the world'.

GEOGRAPHY

Paris is where all the French channels of communication lead; it is the beating heart of the country. From its core, the 20 Parisian *arrondissements* (administrative districts) spiral out like a snail's shell, a pattern that reflects the city's historical development and successive enlargements.

Paris centers around the River Seine, whose flowing waters have long been the lifeblood of the city. The River Seine enters Paris close to the Bois de Vincennes in the south-east and meanders gently north and south past three small, heavily developed islands – the Île St-Louis, Île de la Cité and, on its way out, Île des Cygnes. Chains of hillocks add perspective to the city, with Montmartre (the city's highest point), Ménilmontant, Belleville and

Culture capital

Despite concerted attempts at decentralisation in France, Paris continues to dominate the country's art and literature, music, fashion, education, scientific research, commerce and politics.

Buttes Chaumont rising up to the north of the river, and to the south, Montsouris, the Mont Ste-Geneviève, Buttes aux Cailles and Maison Blanche.

Paris is notionally contained by the Périphérique; a ring road of 35km (22 miles). Built in 1973 to reduce traffic jams, the Périphérique is now invariably congested itself. With 1.1 million cars using the road's 34 exits each day, its future is currently being discussed. Forming two concentric rings wrapped tightly around Paris, the suburbs (known, sometimes derisively, as *la banlieue*) are divided up into *départements*, or counties, much as the rest of France.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Napoleon imposed a special status on the city of Paris, giving it the powers of a *département* in order to maintain a firm hold on the capital's politics and populace. Today, each *arrondissement* also has its own council and mayor to deal with local affairs. In the two houses of the French Parliament, 21 delegates and 12 senators represent the city.

THE RIVER

Fluctuat nec mergitur ('Buffeted by the waves but does not sink'), reads the Latin inscription on the capital's coat-of-arms, symbolising a city born beside the River Seine. The city takes its name from the old Gallic tribe of the Parisii who, according to Julius Caesar, sited their chief city on the largest island in the river. However, the city did not divide the river for long; Roman Lutetia was later founded on the left bank of the Seine in the modern day Latin Quarter area. Today, the Seine cuts a swathe through the city's middle. The Seine is the capital's widest avenue, spanned by a total of 37 bridges, which provide some of the loveliest views of Paris.

The river is the city's calmest thoroughfare, notwithstanding the daily flow of tourist and commercial boat traffic. In the 19th

century, the banks were encumbered with wash-houses and watermills, and its waters heaved with ships from every corner of France. More difficult to imagine are the 700 Viking warships that sailed up the river to invade Paris in the 9th century, or the thousands of bodies that floated past in 1572, victims of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, turning the Seine into a river of blood. Today, barges and pleasure boats ply the river, some on their way to Burgundy via the St-Martin and St-Denis canals, which cut across the northeast of the city.

PARIS AMBIENCE

One of the most persistent images of Paris is one of long avenues elegantly lined with chestnut and plane trees. Flowers and plants abound in a patchwork of squares, parks and gardens, tended in the formal French tradition, or following the

Paris rooftops

