

PARIS, JE T'AI ME

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE MOST FAMOUS CITY IN THE WORLD
BY SHYLIE RIMMER

We New Yorkers like to think that our burg commands attention that puts other metro areas to shame, but the simple fact is that Paris is the most written about, analyzed, and fetishized city on the planet. It's a touchstone of and lightening rod for art, history, fashion, literature, the glories and stresses of democracy...and populated by a citizenry so often drop-dead gorgeous that it is a challenge not to drive one's Citroen straight up a flagpole. It is also the third most travelled-to city, with just over 18 million international overnight visitors in 2016, according to MasterCard's Global Cities Index (Bangkok is first with 21.47 million, London third with 19.88 million, followed by Dubai with 15.27 million and New York with 12.75 million).

Even with celebrity status assured, and with a travel guide canon numbering in the tens of millions of pages, it's stunning the extent to which visitors tend to wander in familiar circles around the Eiffel Tower and the Champs-Élysées, forgetting to take in the stupendous variety offered by the nineteen other

arrondissements (administrative districts), and their occasionally less ostentatious but still extraordinary buildings, gardens, and abundance of chic restaurants, bars, and (of course) boutiques.

Paris also epitomizes luxury generally, from the accounts of Marie-Antoinette's oversized life to the daily afternoon wine that is so ingrained in the city's *raison d'être*.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Consider weather and temperature first, as the city is best explored by foot. May and August are the rainiest months and July is by far the hottest; not to mention Parisians flee the capital during the summer, so you won't be doing as much people watching at street-side cafés. With an average temperature of about 70°F and generally ample sunshine, June and September are ideal months to visit.

Though it is often argued that non-French speakers shouldn't bother visiting the city, a simple "bonjour" paired with politeness will get you a long way among the sometimes-

aloof citizenry. It is recommended to learn basic vocabulary to show that you've put in some effort, however, most Parisians speak close-to-perfect English.

ATTRACTIONS

Le Jardin du Luxembourg dates to the 1600s—a garden frequented by travelers and locals alike (and once the site of the home of Napoleon Bonaparte and his wife). Visiting in the fall will ensure Bombay Sapphire-blue skies and vibrant greenery for optimal photo opportunities. Pick up some picnic fare at La Grande Épicerie—an upscale food hall with marvelous produce—and stroll over to the gardens before settling in for an afternoon of people watching in the sun.

Parc des Buttes Chaumont is a less formal local park in the 19th arrondissement. Come Sunday afternoon, you'll find every Parisian and his or her dog lounging on its hilltop, watching over the city and anticipating a romantic sunset. Don't forget to visit the local bar Rosa Bonheur at the southeast of the park (open Thursday to Sunday) for an evening glass of rosé.

Although most locals opt not to stay in the city during the dog days, there is a damn good reason why some of them do: the Paris Quartier d'été. Since 1990, this festival has been turning the often-unbearable summers into a celebration filled with concerts, fine cuisine, and market stalls. Starting in mid July and ending at the beginning of August, it is hosted in over forty outdoor locations.

Any trip wouldn't be complete without a visit to the Louvre's Musée des Arts Décoratifs. The elegant, non-profit museum is located in the Palais de Louvre's western wing and is surrounded by yet another beautiful garden. This lesser-known section of the world's largest museum has been home to grand exhibitions of the work of famous designers like Louis Vuitton and Valentino. Its schedule is ever changing, so check the website (louvre.fr/en).

WHERE TO STAY

MANDARIN ORIENTAL PARIS
mandarinoriental.com/paris (\$\$\$\$)

A 20-minute stroll from the Louvre, this gem resides in one of the city's most

stylish squares: Place Vendôme in the 1st arrondissement. There are 98 rooms and forty lavish suites in two- or three-bed-room layouts, ranging from \$1,150 per night to \$2,400. Each suite is sound-proofed and offers lavish views of the city. Price includes a full daily breakfast. **251 rue Saint-Honore**

PLAZA ATHÉNÉE
dorchestercollection.com/en/paris/hotel-plaza-athenee (\$\$\$\$)
Hand-embroidered upholstery and silk furniture adorn this legendary venue and *Sex and the City* shooting locale. With 154 rooms and 54 suites, it’s small wonder the 104-year-old hotel commands five restaurants and one simply gorgeous bar. Even more luxury lies in the hotel spa, The Dior Institut. Catering to both males and females, it provides a range of body and beauty treatments, from deep tissue massages to full makeovers. The best part? Pets lighter than 13 pounds are welcome, too. Starting at \$900 per night. **25 avenue Montaigne**

LE METROPOLITAN
hotellemetropolitanparis.com (\$\$\$)
Home to the first champagne bar in Paris, Bar Le Dokhan’s, this Tribute Portfolio Hotel member is among our favorite romantic getaways. Its antique-style bar is beautified with gold, and offers a champagne tasting menu starting at \$35. Sitting conveniently across the river from the Eiffel Tower, the hotel is a comfortable 25-minute stroll from the Champs-Élysées. There are 45 rooms and four suites (our favorites, the Junior Suites, overlook the nearby rooftops) ranging from \$330 to \$675. **117 Rue Lauriston**

DAY TRIPS AND TOURS

CHÂTEAU DE CHANTILLY
Few travellers are aware of this actually rather understated estate. Once owned by the aristocratic Orléans family, the castle can be thought of as a quaint version of the Palace of Versailles, and is



The Panoramic Suite at Mandarin Oriental Paris

a mere 45-minute train journey from the city. In summer months, gardens here are dotted with vendors selling gelato while the hillside is scattered with local families picnicking. But the real wonder here is the bountiful artwork the Orléans collected—the second largest collection of antique paintings after the Louvre. **domainedechantilly.com/fr**

PALACE OF VERSAILLES
Yes, yes, this is hardly a jaw-dropper of a recommendation, but then again, would you recommend Big Apple visitors skip the Empire State Building? Just fifty minutes by car or train from the city, this was residence for three queens of France, including Marie-Antoinette, who famously rankled citizenry and the rest of the court by insisting upon royal quarters that were ostentatious even by Bourbon standards. A ticket is a mere \$20 and includes an audio guide. To avoid peak traffic and long lines, arrive early and pre-purchase tickets online. Another tip is to visit the Trianon complex first, then work your way backwards. This will have you moving against the crowds and finishing at the front of the property. **en.chateauversailles.fr**

VIP PARIS FLIGHT + DINNER
This simply incredible evening for two starts with a one-hour hot air balloon ride and ends with dinner at a four-star castle, with a champagne toast and a visit to the medieval city of Chartres in

between. Run by the company French Adventures, the trip’s principal destination, Chateau d’Esclimont, is a wonderful balance of lavish and homey. The former home of the La Rochefoucauld family, it is a jewel of the Renaissance and a ultra-romantic place to stay in its own right. **frenchadventures.com**

DINE AND DRINK

FRENCHIE RESTAURANT
frenchie-restaurant.com/home-restaurant-fr (\$\$\$\$)
The first of four Frenchie establishments, this neo-bistro from the restless mind of Chef Gregory Marchand, is one of the most notoriously difficult tables to reserve in the city, but brings a wonderful modern twist to old school Gallic cuisine. Opened in 2009, this small space, tucked away in a tiny cobblestone street that used to be a gathering place for thieves and surrounded by the textile industry of the Sentier, offers playfully urban design touches like concrete-gray tables and a corrugated iron bar amidst exposed brick walls and cozy dark wooden beams. International fare includes the five-course dinner degustation menu that shifts seasonally (\$85 without drinks or \$150 with wine pairings). Marchand, who was trained by British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver (and whose kitchen nickname for Marchand inspired the restaurant name), has tra-



Dinner at the Château de Chantilly

versed the globe over his career—including a stint at New York’s Gramercy Tavern. **5 Rue Du Nil**

PRESCRIPTION COCKTAIL CLUB
prescriptioncocktailclub.com (\$\$)
Experimental Group—a hospitality group that owns seven venues in Paris (and others in London, New York, and Ibiza)—is behind this Gatsby-style speakeasy. The bar is open every day until 2 A.M. (Fridays and Saturdays until 4 A.M.), with drinks averaging \$15. Located in one of the city’s most upscale neighborhoods, Saint-Germain-des-Prés (where post-World War II jazz flourished, particularly of the New Orleans variety), the dimly-lit lounge feels as if it’s a relic from the Prohibition era—with a collection of bitters diverse enough for a lifetime of cocktail experimentation. Visit on the weekend and you’ll find the city’s elite socialites crowded into two levels—some lucky enough to be lounging in the third bar, which is hidden behind the bookshelf on the top floor. **23 rue Mazarine**

LE BAR, HOTEL COSTES
hotelcostes.com (\$\$\$)
There was a time when the frequently star-studded bar at Hotel Costes was one of the trendiest places to be seen in Paris (it ought to be: decorator Jacques Garcia’s principal was to create the city’s “most talked about hotel”); now, it’s also one of the most exclusive. Draped with crystal chandeliers and decorated with red velvet chaises and lampshades, the hotel’s associated bar is the summa of lounge lizardry. Cocktails are \$30 (that’s right, *mon ami*), and while you’d imagine a place like this to be all about the martinis, Le Bar’s strawberry daiquiri is one of our summer favorites. Don’t come here for the friendly service, however, just the vibe: it’s a luxurious way to start (or end) the night, and a singular chance to watch local fashion icons vaguely disapproving of each other in their natural habitat. **239 Rue Saint Honoré** 



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