Long considered the paragon of style, Paris is perhaps the most glamorous city in Europe. It is at once deeply traditional – a village-like metropolis whose inhabitants continue to be notorious for their hauteur – and famously cosmopolitan. The city’s reputation as a magnet for writers, artists and dissidents lives on, and it remains at the forefront of Western intellectual, artistic and literary life. The most tangible and immediate pleasures of Paris are found in its street life and along the banks and bridges of the River Seine. Cafés, bars and restaurants line every street and boulevard, and the city’s compactness makes it possible to experience the individual feel of the different *quartiers*. Continue reading to find out more about... Brief history What to do in Paris In terms of where to go in Paris, you can move easily, even on foot, from the calm, almost small-town atmosphere of [**Montmartre**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/montmartre-around/) and parts of the [**Quartier Latin**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/quartier-latin/) to the busy commercial centres of the Grands Boulevards and [**Opéra-Garnier**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/the-opera-district/the-opera-garnier/) or the aristocratic mansions of the [**Marais**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/marais/). The city’s lack of open space is redeemed by unexpected havens like the [**Mosque**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/quartier-latin/mosquee-de-paris/) and the[**place des Vosges**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\paris\marais\place-des-vosges\), and courtyards and gardens of grand houses like the [**Hôtel de Soubise**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/marais/musee-de-lhistoire-de-france/). The gravelled paths and formal beauty of the [**Tuileries**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/the-champs-elysees-and-around/jardin-des-tuileries/) create the backdrop for the ultimate Parisian Sunday promenade, while the islands and quaysides of the Left and Right banks of the **River Seine** and the Quartier Latin’s two splendid parks, the [**Luxembourg**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\paris\st-germain\jardin-du-luxembourg\) and the [**Jardin des Plantes**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/quartier-latin/jardin-des-plante/), make for a wonderful wander. Paris’s architectural spirit resides in the elegant streets and boulevards begun in the nineteenth century under Baron Haussmann. The mansion blocks that line them are at once grand and perfectly human in scale, a triumph in city planning proved by the fact that so many remain residential to this day. Rising above these harmonious buildings are the more arrogant monuments that define the French capital. For centuries, an imposing classical style prevailed with great set pieces such as the [**Louvre**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\paris\louvre\), [**Panthéon**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/quartier-latin/the-pantheon/) and [**Arc de Triomphe**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/the-champs-elysees-and-around/arc-triomphe/), but the last hundred years or so has seen the architectural mould repeatedly broken in a succession of ambitious structures, the industrial chic of the [**Eiffel Tower**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\paris\eiffel-tower-quarter\eiffel-tower\) and [**Pompidou Centre**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/beaubourg-around/centre-pompidou/)contrasting with the almost spiritual glasswork of the Louvre **[Pyramide](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/louvre/the-musee-du-louvre/" \o "The Musée du Louvre)** and **[Institut du Monde Arabe](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/quartier-latin/institut-du-monde-arabe/" \o "Institut du Monde Arabe)**. Paris is remarkable, too, for its museums – there are nearly 150 of them, ranging from giants of the art world such as the Louvre, **[Musée d’Orsay](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/paris/st-germain/musee-dorsay/" \o "Musée d’Orsay)** and Pompidou Centre to lesser-known gems such as the Picasso, Rodin and Jewish museums – and the diversity of entertainment, from cinema to jazz music, on offer. **Brief history** Paris’s **history** has conspired to create a sense of being apart from, and even superior to, the rest of the country. To this day, everything beyond the capital is known quite ordinarily as *province* – the provinces. Appropriately, the city’s first inhabitants, the **Parisii**, a Celtic tribe that arrived in around the third century BC, had their settlement on an island: Lutetia, probably today’s Île de la Cité. The **Romans** conquered the city two centuries later, and preferred the more familiar hilly ground of the Left Bank. Their city, also called Lutetia, grew up around the hill where the Panthéon stands today. This hill, now known as the Montagne Ste-Geneviève, gets its name from Paris’s first patron saint, who, as legend has it, saved the town from the marauding army of Attila in 451 through her exemplary holiness. Fifty years later **Geneviève** converted another invader to Christianity: Clovis the Frank, the leader of a group of Germanic tribes, went on to make the city the capital of his kingdom. His newly founded Merovingian dynasty promptly fell apart under his son Childéric II. Power only returned to Paris under **Hugues Capet**, the Count of Paris. He was elected king of France in 987, although at the time his territory amounted to little more than the Île de France, the region immediately surrounding Paris. From this shaky start French monarchs gradually extended their control over their feudal rivals, centralizing administrative, legal, financial and political power as they did so, until anyone seeking influence, publicity or credibility, in whatever field, had to be in Paris – which is still the case today. The city’s cultural influence grew alongside its **university**, which was formally established in 1215 and swiftly became the great European centre for scholastic learning. The wars and plagues of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries left Paris half in ruins and more than half abandoned, but with royal encouragement, the city steadily recovered. During the **Wars of Religion** the capital remained staunchly Catholic, but Parisians’ loyalty to the throne was tested during the mid-seventeenth-century rebellions known as the Frondes, in which the young Louis XIV was forced to flee the city. Perhaps this traumatic experience lay behind the king’s decision, in 1670, to move the court to his vast new palace at **Versailles**. Paris suffered in the court’s absence, even as grand Baroque buildings were being thrown up in the capital. Parisians, both as deputies to the Assembly and mobs of sans-culottes, were at the forefront of the **Revolution**, but many of the new citizens welcomed the return to order under Napoleon I. The emperor adorned the city with many of its signature monuments, Neoclassical almost-follies designed to amplify his majesty: the Arc de Triomphe, Arc du Carrousel and the Madeleine. He also instituted the Grandes Écoles, super-universities for the nation’s elite administrators, engineers and teachers. At the fall of the Empire, in 1814, Paris was saved from destruction by the arch-diplomat Talleyrand, who delivered the city to the Russians with hardly a shot fired. Nationalists grumbled that the occupation continued well into the Restoration regime, as the city once again became the playground of the rich of Europe, the ultimate tourist destination. The greatest shocks to the fabric of the city came under Napoléon III. He finally completed the Louvre, rebuilding much of the facade in the process, but it was his Prefect of the Seine, **Baron Haussmann**, who truly transformed the city, smashing through the slums to create wide boulevards that could be easily controlled by rifle-toting troops – not that it succeeded in preventing the **1871 Commune**, the most determined insurrection since 1789. It was down these large boulevards, lined with grey bourgeois residences, that **Nazi troops** paraded in June 1940, followed by the Allies, led by General Leclerc, in August 1944. Although riotous street protests have been a feature of modern Parisian life – most famously in **May 1968**, when students burst onto the streets of the Quartier Latin – the traditional barricade-builders have long since been booted into the depressing satellite towns, known as la banlieue, alongside the under-served populations of immigrants and their descendants. Integrating these communities, riven with poverty, unemployment and discontent, is one of the greatest challenges facing the city and is one that a new administrative entity, the **Métropole du Grand Paris**, incorporating some four million people from the immediate suburbs and due to come into effect in 2016–17, hopes to address. Meanwhile, the city’s Socialist and first woman mayor, **Anne Hidalgo**, is continuing the green policies of her popular predecessor, **Bertrand Delanoë**, creating a more cycle-friendly environment, and planning to reclaim for pedestrians more of the riverbank, as well as the city’s famous squares, place de la Bastille and place de la Nation. In the wake of the **Charlie Hebdo shootings** in January 2015 – when seventeen people, including well-known journalists of the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo,*were shot dead by three self-confessed jihadists from the Paris area – the city experienced a renewed sense of unity and solidarity, which prompted the mayor to put the city forward as a candidate to host the Olympic Games in 2024. **What to do in Paris 1. Climb the Eiffel Tower** It may seem familiar from afar, but close up the Eiffel Tower is still an excitingly improbable structure; an ascent to the top is an unforgettable experience. You can skip the line with [priority access](https://www.getyourguide.co.uk/paris-l16/skip-the-line-ticket-to-the-summit-of-the-eiffel-tower-t149861/?partner_id=77VWGWU&utm_medium=online_publisher&utm_source=rough_guides&placement=other). **2. Wander around the Parc Rives de Seine or take a cruise on the Seine** Join the joggers and cyclists, have a picnic or just soak up the wonderful views on the Parc Rives de Seine, a scenic riverside loop that takes in both the Right and Left banks. Better still, enjoy a [cruise](https://www.getyourguide.co.uk/paris-l16/bateaux-parisiens-cruise-quick-entry-ticket-t193940/?partner_id=77VWGWU&utm_medium=online_publisher&utm_source=rough_guides&placement=other) on the river itself. **3. Marvel at Sainte-Chapelle** [Sainte-Chapelle](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/sainte-chapelle-priority-entrance-p974484/?partner=RoughGuides)'s stunning stained-glass windows rank among the greatest achievements of French High Gothic. **4. See amazing art at the Museé Picasso** A fabulously restored Marais mansion is the setting for this unrivalled collection of Picasso's paintings, sculptures, drawings and ceramics. Book [priority entrance](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/musee-national-picasso-paris-priority-entrance-p974460/?partner=RoughGuides) to bypass the queues. **5. Discover the Musée d'Orsay** France's greatest collection of Impressionist (and pre- and post-Impressionist) art is found at the [Musée d'Orsay](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/musee-dorsay-dedicated-entrance-p973980?partner=RoughGuides" \t "_blank), housed in a beautiful converted railway station. **6. Check out cutting-edge modern art at the Centre Pompidou** The [Pompidou](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/centre-pompidou-p974349?partner=RoughGuides)'s radical "inside-out" architecture looks just as ground-breaking as it did when it first opened in the 1970s, and its modern art museum is a knockout. **7. Appreciate stunning sculptures at the Musée Rodin** Rodin's stirring sculptures are shown off to their best advantage in the sculptor's elegant eighteenth-century [mansion and garden](https://www.getyourguide.co.uk/paris-l16/rodin-museum-guided-tour-t131166/?partner_id=77VWGWU&utm_medium=online_publisher&utm_source=rough_guides&placement=other). **8. Love the Louvre** You could easily spend a whole day (and more) exploring the world-class [Louvre](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/louvre-museum-e-ticket-p973698?partner=RoughGuides)'s collections, including famous Italian Renaissance paintings and ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. **9. Explore the Foundation Louis Vuitton** Frank Gehry's astonishing "cloud of glass" in the Bois de Boulogne holds an inspiring collection of contemporary art. [Premium access](https://www.tiqets.com/en/paris-c66746/fondation-louis-vuitton-premium-access-p974974?partner=RoughGuides) will allow you to use a separate entrance and covers entrance to temporary exhibitions. **10. Take the train to Versailles**The ultimate French royal palace, awesome in its size and magnificence, and boasting exquisite gardens that are free to visit. [Go by train](https://www.getyourguide.co.uk/paris-l16/versailles-by-train-tour-from-paris-with-skip-the-line-t191702/?partner_id=77VWGWU&utm_medium=online_publisher&utm_source=rough_guides&placement=other) for a stress-free trip.