

Title:

The Parisian Rules of Tipping

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Summary:

Sitting at the terrace of a sidewalk cafe in Paris and sipping on a Perrier while watching passers-by is a pleasure many travelers promise themselves to experience when they are in Paris. But with the check comes the question: to tip or not to tip?

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Article Body:

Sitting at the terrace of a sidewalk cafe in Paris and sipping on a Perrier while watching passers-by is a pleasure many travelers promise themselves to experience when they are in Paris. But with the check comes the question: to tip or not to tip?

The check is all inclusive

Unlike in America, cafes and restaurants in Paris directly include a 15% service charge in your check. This is required by French law as tips are assessed for taxation purposes.

The 15% service charge is clearly itemized on your check, on top of the VAT tax (a French version of the sales tax). The words 'Service compris' (Tip included) indicate that the tip has already been included in the total to be paid.

The good news is that prices rated on the menus are all-inclusive: they include both the 15% tip and the sales tax. There is no last-minute unholy surprise when you are given your check. What you saw on the menu is what you get charged for, no hidden extras.

So no extra-tips then?

Well, a small extra-tip is always appreciated of course. It's the mark you were

satisfied with the way you were served by your waiter ('garçon' in French, pronounced 'Gar-son' with the 'on' sounded like in 'honking' not like in 'son'). It's a sort of a 'Thank You' note. But you are under no obligation here.

Small extra-tips are also appreciated because they directly line your waiter's pockets, unlike the 15% tip charge which is usually tallied up at the end of the day, and divided amongst all waiters. In some bars the owner may even keep the totality or part of the tip charge. French law does not require indeed that service charges be distributed to waiters. So your waiter might not even see a dime of it.

But once again, you paid your dues when paying your check, and you are under no obligation to extra tip.

How much should the extra tip be?

Extra tips may range from just a couple of Euro dimes for a coffee or a soft drink, to 1-5 euros for a lunch or dinner. A nice 'Thank You' is 5 to 10% of the total check. But once again, there is no obligation, and no steadfast rule as far as the percentage goes.

Tipping elsewhere

A tip is a valuable extra income for their beneficiaries.

Case in point: taxi drivers. The average driver employed by a cab company earns about €1,400 a month - which is roughly equivalent to \$2,500 in New York City. This is for 10 hours of hard work per day. A few years ago, cab drivers used to work 14-15 hours a day, 6 days a week to pad up their wages. French law now forbids it. So tipping them 5-10% of your fare is generous.

It is customary to tip the usherette at the Opera house: a couple of euros are fine [the usherettes get also paid on sales of evening programs]. Give 50 euro cents the ushers at the movies. There was a time, not so long ago, when usherettes at movie theaters were not paid at all by theater operators. They lived on tips only. This is no more the case today and they are on salary, but usually no more than the minimum wage.

One euro per bag to your hotel porter should make him smile.

In some expensive restaurants, at classical concerts halls, or at the discos, ladies in the lobby usually take care of your coats. It is customary to tip 1 euro for every large item when you come back to pick up your belongings.

If you take a guided tour at the museum, you might leave 1 or 2 euros to your guide to thank him for imparting his knowledge to you.

Summing up

These are guidelines based on custom and experience. Yet they are not strictly followed. These advices apply as well in other parts of France, where your tips will be considered a mark of generosity on your part as the standards of living there are not as high as in Paris.

This is what tipping really is: a demonstration of generosity, and a way to express satisfaction for the service you were just provided.

(Written in collaboration with Vincent Ramelli, a Paris-born expert of the city and a regular contributor to Paris-Eiffel-Tower-News.com)