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PARIS ESSENTIALS

“The American arrives in Paris with a few French phrases he has culled from a conversational guide or picked up from a friend who owns a beret.”

- Fred Allen

The “Is It Worth Going” Score:

99 Points out of a possible 100. Only London scores higher and that's because they speak a form of English.

The Best Advice:

- Totally disregard the negative impressions of Paris one hears occasionally from American tourists who are on their first excursion beyond Rockford. Paris is the most beautiful, most graceful, art-filled, polished monument packed, gastronomically superb, sleek wide -boulevarde, Arpege-scented, Hermes scarfed, , croissant-flaked, living-breathing artist colony of a city, in the world. Only the emotionally dead and a handful of anal-retentives who think style is something you find in the Sears catalog will fail to appreciate her still-magnetic charms.
- Whatever you do, don't try to speak French. The French will grimace and pretend they don't understand what possible language you are attempting to speak, or they will smile and overcharge you for so badly mispronouncing their language. There are two important things you must understand about the French. They cannot comprehend our ignorance of the world and inability to communicate in more than one language. And. in their culture, people who smile a lot and for no apparent reason, are thought to be *imbeciles*. So, don't smile at them and begin each sentence “j'ai une problem”. The French love to solve problems and they will be quite gracious if you admit you are helpless.
- Do take at least one orientation daytime bus tour within 24-hours of your arrival. Use this tour to get oriented and to decide where you would like to spend your time. Try to book one of the glass bubble-top Cityrama or Paris Visions tours in English.
- Don't ever book a Parisian night tour. I don't want to see you escorted past the real nightlife of Paris into a tourist nightclub that seems filled with half the population of Bayonne, New Jersey. If you feel you have to see a striptease while in Paris, head for the Crazy Horse, or enjoy one in the privacy of your hotel room.
- There is one touristy kind of thing I want you to do. Please take one of the better dinner cruises along the Seine at night. Bateaux-Mouches is the most popular but Yachts de Paris (tel. 44-37-10-20) is the best, with menus prepared by Michelin-starred chef Gerard Besson.

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- If you have three days in Paris, plan on spending one full day covering the most impressive walk you will ever encounter, from the Arc de' Triumph to the Louvre. Sure there's crass commercialism along the Champs- Elysees but it is still the most beautiful boulevard in the world.
- Don't go to the Louvre at all unless you have first prepared for your visit. A full day is a bare minimum, but the Louvre is best digested in three-hour stretches in the morning, followed by a walk in the Tuileries and a long, leisurely lunch. The new wings have increased space by 80%. The museum is closed on Tuesday. There is a 50-shop upscale shopping center under the Arc de Triomphe Carrousel.
- Make sure you visit the Jeu de Paume and the Musee de L'Orangerie. I will wager that you prefer both to the more daunting Louvre.
- Don't put a lot of faith in anyone's restaurant recommendations, including mine. A large part of the excitement of Paris is the memorable lunch or dinner that lies just around the corner. It isn't at all necessary to spend the money or the effort getting into one of the "top ten" places. Beware of restaurants that post their menus in several languages. Look for restaurants filled with frowning locals. Don't eat in bars or at places called "Le Drugstore".
- Picnic in the Jardin des Tuileries at least once. You may think that there is fine art in the Louvre. Wait until you see the french version of a delicatessen.
- If you have a choice, spend your days on the Right Bank and your nights on the Left.
- Do consider going to an English-language movie one night on the Champs Elysees. You will sit in comfortable leather seats and enjoy pre-movie drinks in the theater's cocktail lounge. Look for V.O. (Version original) in the title.
- Do take the metro out to the "neighborhoods". Visit Auteuil, an almost pastoral setting and sacred literary grounds. Don't forget to take a photo of Paris' most beautiful subway entrance. Stroll along the rue d'Auteuil past Moliere's House to Au Clocher du Village, a simple village bistro. You won't encounter tourists here. During the early evening, the adventurous Parisian traveler heads for Belleville, the melting pot of Paris with some of the best ethnic storefront restaurants and very reasonable prices. One place, Chez-Francois, actually specializes in Jewish-Tunesian fare.

When To Go:

Paris closes down in August when everyone tries to get away. July is uncomfortably warm. While I am a strong advocate of off-season travel to Europe, so much of the beauty of Paris is outdoors that November through mid-March are not recommended. That leaves April, May, early June, September, and the first two weeks of October as the ideal times to visit.

How To Get There:

To begin your European experience at O'Hare, consider Air France flight # 55, which is 747 service to Charles de Gaulle (about 15 miles northeast of the

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city). American will get you to Paris using the twin-engine 767. United's flight # 942 is the new 777.

Getting Downtown From The Airport:

If you arrive at Charles de Gaulle on an Air France flight, the chances are you will come into Aerogare # 2. Other international airlines are usually assigned Aerogare # 1. From either terminal, the best route into the city, short of a \$60-70 taxi ride, is the Air France airport bus which departs every 12 minutes and stops at the Palais des Congres (closest metro is Porte Maillot) and the Arc de Triomphe (closest metro is Charles de Gaulle - Etoile.)

An alternative if you're staying near the Opera, is Roissybus # 352 which departs every 15 minutes for the Place de l'Opera.

Orly airport is 9 miles south of Paris. Take the Air France bus which depart every 12 minutes for the Invalides Air Terminal. If you need to make the 50-minute trip between de Gaulle and Orly take the Air France Airport shuttle which departs every 30 minutes.

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