

# PARIS 101 GUIDE

Important things you **MUST** know  
for your first visit to Paris

by **LILY HEISE** of **LOVE + PARIS**



# PARIS 101 GUIDE

Bonjour 🇫🇷

At Love and Paris, we're a team of Paris experts, but more importantly, energetic locals who are here to help you have your BEST visit ever, giving you the insider info you NEED, as if we've all been friends for years.

We love giving our followers tips and tricks for your visit in our videos and articles, but this guide gives you more details and keeps it all in one place for you to always go back and review— handy.

You'll find all the important things you MUST know for your first visit to Paris, plus where to find other helpful info across our platforms.

BTW, this guide was written by Lily, our resident Parisian writer who has written about Paris for major publications for years. She really knows her stuff, and she's passing this knowledge onto YOU.

When you're done reading, don't forget to browse our [website](#) for more tips and tricks, including hotel recommendations, top tours and experiences you'll want to book, and other helpful info that will help you make this the trip of a lifetime.

Merci ❤️

The Love and Paris team

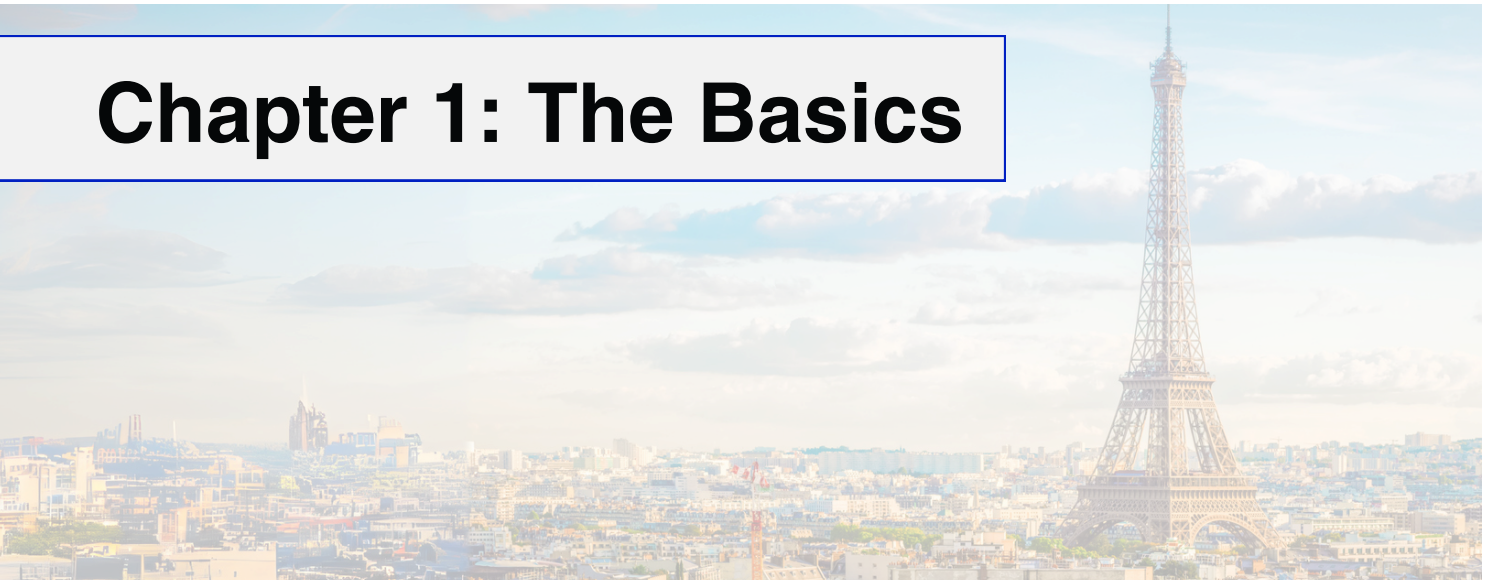
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# Chapter 1: The Basics



## **National currency:**

EUR, The Euro

## **Currency sign:**

€

## **Time zone:**

Central European Time (CET)

## **Language:**

French, but most customer service staff speak English

## **Driving and cycling:**

Right-hand side

## **Measurement:**

Metric

## **Average costs (relative to rest of world):**

Moderately expensive

## **Credit or debit card acceptance level:**

Moderate (and improving)

## **Minimum drinking age:**

18 (or 16 with parents present)

## **ID required at all times:**

Officially yes, however, it's rarely asked for. You may prefer to leave your passport in the hotel safe and carry a photocopy of it or a photo on your phone.

## Chapter 2: Money

The national currency of France is the euro (€), which is shared with 19 other European countries, so if you're left with an extra change at the end of your trip to Paris, it'll come in handy on your future travels in Europe.

There are 100 *centimes* (or cents) in one euro. It's available in notes/bills of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, and 500 euros, all of which have a different size and color – but be a little careful with the 10 and 50 bills as their shades of orange are similar. Coins are available in 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 centimes and 1 and 2 euros.

The value of the euro, as with any currency, fluctuates daily, so it's useful to have a currency converter app like [XE](#) on your phone so that you know what the current rate is – although coming up with an “approximate” amount is just fine when doing quick calculations in your head.

## Credit or debit card acceptance level

Many countries around the world are going cashless, which is making travel a LOT easier. France is a little behind on this, however, over the last few years it's been making good progress. Large stores, supermarkets, and museums usually have no limit or €1 as the minimum to pay by card. Some smaller independent shops (such as bakeries or food stands) might not take credit cards or have a minimum purchase of €10 to pay by card. Given this, it's a good idea to have some euro cash on hand. It's also useful to have some change for leaving tips at cafés and restaurants (read more on tipping below).



# How to get euros in cash before arriving to Paris

You can either get some cash before you leave for Paris, ideally from your bank as it'll offer a fair rate (order this in advance), or withdraw euros using your credit or debit card when you arrive in the city. There are cash machines (ATMs) at the airports and train stations as well as a LOT across the city – you'll usually find these on busier streets.

In French ATMs are called *distributeurs automatique* or *distributeurs de billets*. We recommend using an ATM that's attached to an actual bank (*banque* in French) instead of the ones that are installed next to souvenir shops in tourist zones as these will charge you a service fee, while ATMs at real banks will usually not (your own bank *might* charge you a fee though, you can check this before leaving on your trip).



As soon as you put your debit or credit card into a French ATM, the text on the screen usually switches to English, so you don't have to worry about having French language skills to get your euros.

## Tipping in Paris

Every country has its own tipping customs and the good news is, these are relatively straightforward in France.

In ALL restaurants, bars, and cafés, a 15% service charge is automatically included in the price of food and drinks. Sometimes this is indicated on your bill with the line "*service compris*". French wait staff do not work for tips (*pourboire* in French), they earn a living wage and have paid holidays and healthcare benefits.

So, you don't technically need to tip *anywhere*, BUT a small tip is appreciated. If you have a friendly or efficient server, you can leave a small gratuity of no more than around 5% of your total bill.

For example, if you order a coffee or other beverage at a café, you could leave 20 to 50 *centimes* per drink. For a meal at a casual café or restaurant, leaving €1 to €2 per person is appropriate. If you're dining at a high-end restaurant, where the service is usually very attentive, you could leave 5-10%. But bear in mind, you don't need to feel obliged to leave anything!

It's best to leave a tip in cash, but if you are paying by credit card, before your server punches in the bill amount on the credit card machine, you can ask them to put in a different amount to add on a tip (i.e. if your bill is €28, you could ask them to charge you €30).



A word of caution if you end up in restaurants near tourist sites (which we recommend you avoid!) – your waiter might try to tell you that a tip isn't included. While this is technically true (service is included, an extra tip is not), you really don't need to leave them anything, especially if they *suggest* leaving a tip.

For taxi drivers, you can simply “round up” to the nearest euro or for airport transfers you could leave your driver €5 to €10 depending on how many passengers and if they've helped you with your luggage. For tour guides, a suggested tip might be included in your confirmation email, but it's generally not mandatory to give one, although it's always appreciated.

# Chapter 3: Layout of the City



Paris is a very compact city, so once you get the hang of how it's organized, it should be easy enough to get around.

Although there are several zones of suburbs around the city, most tourists don't leave the core of what is officially "Paris" – which is the city's 20 districts. These are called *arrondissements*, and they are enclosed by the *péripherique*, an express ring road. The *arrondissements* are numbered (1-20), which makes knowing where you are a little easier! These start around the Louvre, and go out in a clockwise spiral. If you get lost, just look up at a street sign (which are blue and attached to buildings on street corners) as they indicate the *arrondissement* with a number above the street's name.

In addition to the *arrondissements*, the city is also divided by the Seine River. Its two sides are called the Left Bank (roughly on the south side of the river) and the Right Bank (to the north). The river is very curvacious and changes direction too much, which is why they can't say north and south or east and west, as you may find in other cities.



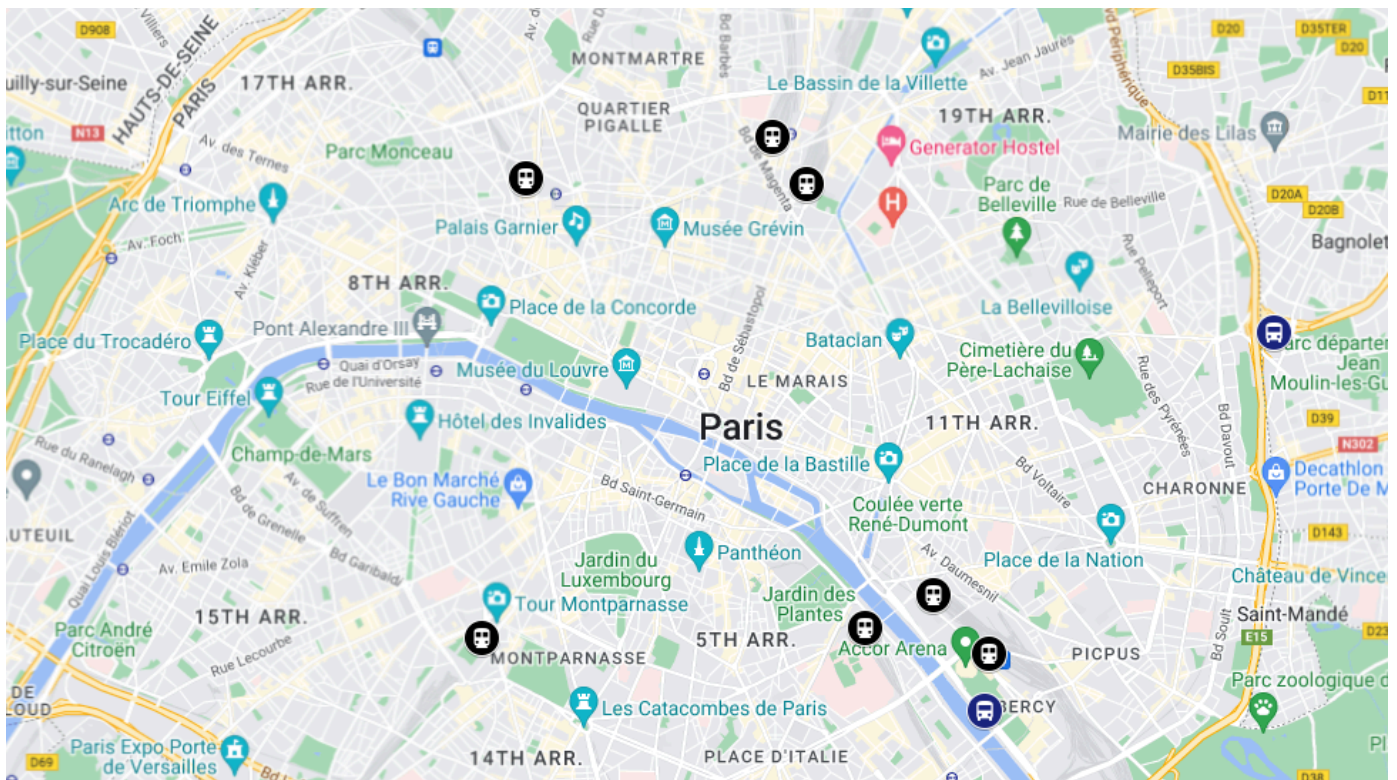
# Getting to Paris: airports, train and bus stations

Three airports serve Paris, so be sure to check which one you'll be arriving into. Most international flights land at Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), while Orly (ORY) has mainly domestic and European flights, and Beauvais (BVA) is used by low cost companies. You can read all about getting into Paris from these airports in [this article](#).

Paris also has seven train stations and two intercity bus stations.



Each train station has trains traveling in different directions depending on where they are located in the city. Gare du Nord is the most international, with trains connecting Paris to England, Belgium, and The Netherlands. The two intercity bus stations are Bercy and Gallieni, each used by different bus companies, and travel around France and to neighboring countries



# Chapter 4: Transportation

Using a map app like [CityMapper](#) or [Google Maps](#) can be a real lifesaver while traveling in Paris (and elsewhere!). It'll give you the best options for getting from place to place via public transport, whether by métro, train, bus, taxi, bike or any other option.

If you're in a métro station, you can also ask the station attendant for help, most are equipped with an iPad with a special translation app, so you don't have to worry about trying to speak French – even if they don't speak English, they should be able to help you.

Paris is a great walking city, so we encourage you to get around on foot as much as possible, that way you'll be able to take in more of its smaller details and local life. However, you'll likely need some sort of transportation to get to farther-flung places. Luckily, Paris has an excellent and really affordable transit system.

Run by [Ile-de-France Mobilités](#) (the greater Paris region transit agency), it includes an underground system (le métro), suburban trains (RER), buses, and trams. There's also an excellent and super cheap bike-share system called [Vélib-Métropole](#).

There are ticket vending machines in the main entrances to métro and RER stations and tram stops. In terms of tickets, the fastest and easiest way to purchase tickets is through your phone through the Bonjour RATP app, available in the [Google Play Store](#) and [Apple App Store](#).

You can also get a Navigo Easy, a rechargeable card onto which you can load virtual tickets. These cost €2 and are available from ticket vending counters and new ticket machines and then you can purchase up to 20 tickets at a time or single tickets as you need them.

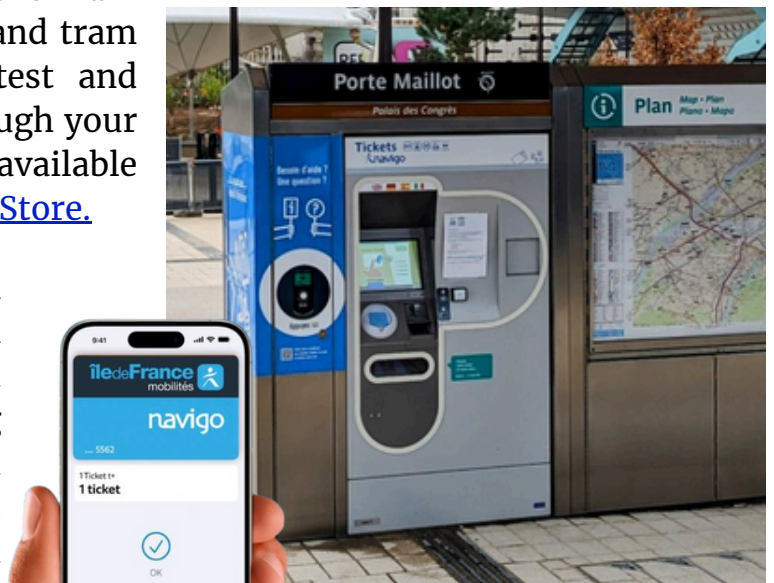


Image courtesy of Ile de France Mobilités

## Cost of Public Transport

A single ticket costs €2.50 for the métro and RER and €2 for the bus or tram. This is for travel anywhere in the greater metropolitan area of Paris EXCEPT for the airports (which costs €13). Read [this article](#) for more information on how to pay for public transport. A single journey ticket is valid for 90 minutes, which should be ample time to get to your destination.

If you're traveling with children 9 and under, they are either eligible for discounted or free tickets, which can help families save a lot of money – and this can make a BIG difference for your trip budget. Read more in [this article](#) on paying for children on public transport.



Image courtesy of RATP

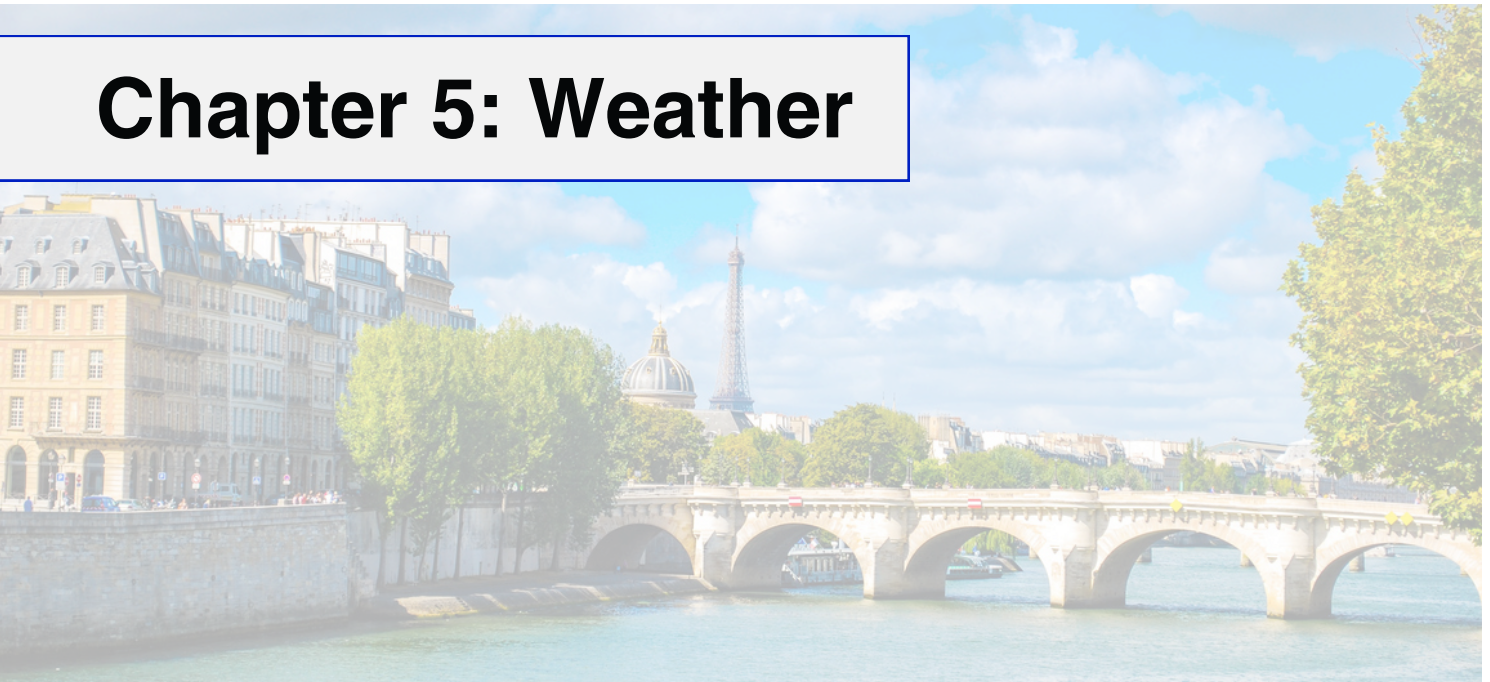
## Taxis and rideshare services in Paris

We totally understand that there are situations in which you'd rather get around by car and you've got various options for this in Paris. The city has classic taxis which circulate throughout the city. These can be any color or brand of car, but you can spot them thanks to the illuminated "taxi" sign on the roof (green for available, red for occupied). If the sign is green, you can hail it down for raising your arm, find one at a designated taxi stand, or book one through the [FreeNow](#) taxi/ride-share app. The French taxi company G7 also has its own app through which you can book "green" taxis (eco-friendly electric cars).



In addition to [FreeNow](#), there are a few different ride-share apps in France including [Uber](#), [Bolt](#), and [Heetch](#) (which tends to be cheaper than the others).

## Chapter 5: Weather



Despite having four seasons, the weather in Paris doesn't always match the time of year and is a tad unpredictable. Every year the weather in each season varies. One year, spring will be *really* rainy and another year it'll be super sunny and warm. There are often heatwaves for a few weeks in summer, but this can happen anytime from late June to late August – so it's impossible to plan for those. Winter is the one reliable season, and unfortunately so as it's usually chilly, wet, and grey, although snow is rare and it doesn't often go below freezing.

This makes it a bit tricky for you to decide what to pack. One thing you can do is check the average weather for your travel dates on Google a few months before your trip. Then check the weather forecast again the week before your departure to see what's being predicted, and pack accordingly.

Take an extra piece of clothing or two to account for colder or warmer temperatures than was originally predicted. Layers are also a good idea for Paris and if you've misjudged what to pack, it gives you a good excuse to do some shopping ([see recommendations in chapter 7](#)).

## Chapter 6: Accommodation



There are a number of really great areas to stay in in Paris. However, with literally thousands of hotels to choose from, selecting ONE is possibly the hardest decision you'll have to make when planning your trip.

To help you with this, we've put together some useful resources on our site, to match all tastes, budgets, and travel requirements.

Check out the [accommodation section](#) on the Love and Paris website for our most recent tips and advice. It contains articles on great [hotels for families](#), excellent [budget-friendly hotels](#), the [best hostels](#), and more.

[\*\*EXPLORE THE ACCOMMODATION SECTION\*\*](#)



## Best Areas to Stay

If you're wondering which Paris neighborhoods are best to stay in, we also have you covered. If you'd like to be in neighborhoods close to the top sites and attractions, read this article on [8 great neighborhoods to stay in while visiting Paris](#).

However, if you're looking for a district that has more of a neighborhood vibe – which often have more affordable hotels – read our article on [the best local areas to stay in](#). Both articles include hotel recommendations in our selected districts that fit all budgets and styles.

We also have articles that zoom in on our favorite areas of the city, like this article on [best hotels in the Marais](#).

By the way – just because an area is NOT part of those articles, it doesn't mean it's a bad place to stay! This is merely a curated list of our recommendations. We're sure you'll have a fabulous time in Paris no matter where you stay!



## Why we don't recommend Airbnb

We generally do not recommend booking an Airbnb or another type of "holiday rental" in Paris, namely because these have reduced affordable housing for locals.

Instead, there are tons of great hotels to choose from in Paris, no matter your budget, as well as some fantastic apart-hotels that are a great alternative to Airbnb. Search for these on [Booking.com](#).

# Chapter 7: What to Do in Paris



There's so much to do in Paris, whether you're interested in art, history, gastronomy, or simply want to take in local life.

If you'd like to visit museums like the Louvre and Orsay or monuments such as the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe, we recommend joining one of the options in our list of [top guided tours of Paris attractions](#). These include advance tickets and super knowledgeable guides who know how to navigate even the busiest sites.

If you're not into tours, we highly recommend purchasing tickets to any of the city's top museums and monuments that you'd like to visit in advance. This will save you a lot of time by not waiting in line on-site (or risk tickets being sold out). You can buy tickets through venue websites or on the [Get Your Guide website](#).



If you're traveling with children, it's good to know that kids 17 and under get in for free at national museums and sites, like the Louvre, Orsay, and Versailles. Keep your children engaged in a fun way with these unique and [cool things to do in Paris with kids](#).

We're also big fans of exploring neighborhoods and doing offbeat things like the suggestions in our articles on [top unique tours to book in Paris](#) and [unique experiences you MUST do when visiting Paris](#).

As a gastronomic city, getting to know the city's food scene is something many visitors want to do when in Paris (and is a delicious activity too!). You can learn the ins and outs of its food and wine culture on these [top food tours](#), [best drinking tours](#) and more.

[Explore the Food and Drinks section.](#)



*Image courtesy of Tiger Tours*

If you're looking for something different to do in the evening, you might like to book one of these [top skip-the-line and private tours](#) or these [fun drinking tours and experiences](#).

[Explore the Tours & Experiences section.](#)

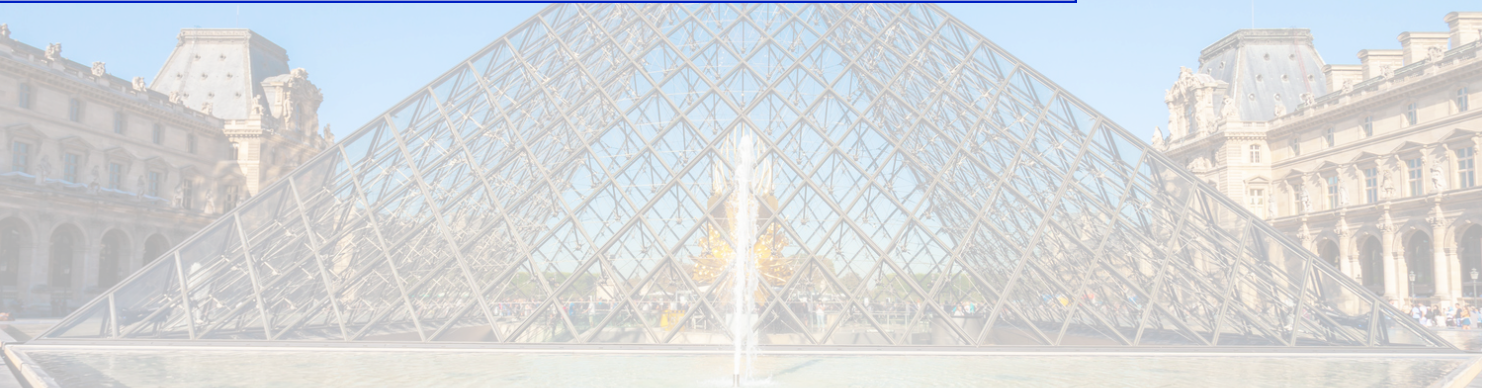
Wandering the city's great flea markets is also a lot of fun, and if you'd like to do some eco-responsible shopping while you're here, visit the best vintage and thrift shops in Paris - *we have a few articles coming soon.*

[Explore the Things to Do section.](#)



# Chapter 8:

## Logistical Tips and Info



Lastly, we've brought together some additional useful tips for different types of travelers that'll help make your trip go smoothly.

## Accessibility in Paris

As an old city, Paris isn't always the easiest city to navigate for visitors with reduced mobility. However, in recent years, some big improvements have been made to the city's accessibility.

Major museums, including the Louvre, Orsay, and Centre Pompidou, are all accessible. For getting around the city, more and more sidewalks are sloped at intersections and major crosswalks have vocal notifications to alert the visually impaired when the light is green or red. All new restaurants must have accessible bathrooms and you can find some great accessible hotels on [booking.com](https://www.booking.com).



*Image courtesy of RATP*

For getting around the city on public transport, there's a useful [transit map](#) that indicates which stations are accessible and which ones have maps in braille.

## Dietary restrictions

We've been happy to see a rapidly growing number of restaurants, bakeries, and other eateries that offer options for those with dietary restrictions.

Many restaurants now offer at least one vegetarian (*végétarien*) option while some also have dishes for vegans (*végan/végétalien*) or that are gluten-free (*sans gluten*). The French eat a lot of potatoes as side dishes, so there are usually several gluten-free options available in most places.



*Image courtesy of Noglu*

There are now many strictly vegetarian and vegan restaurants and there's even a completely vegetarian bakery chain, [Land&Monkeys](#). There's also a fully gluten-free restaurant/bakery, [Noglu](#), and others popping up around the city. Creperies are good options for vegetarians and gluten-free travelers as savory crepes can include only vegetarian ingredients and they are made with buckwheat flour which is gluten-free.

## Travelling with kids

Paris is a great destination for kids, but as with any city, it can also be a little challenging or tiring for children. You can keep your children engaged in a fun way by booking some family-friendly activities, like the ones we mentioned in [Chapter 7](#) and [in this article](#).

With free entrance for kids 17 and under at national museums and sites and discounted transport tickets for kids 9 and under, Paris offers some great advantages for families ([see Chapter 4](#)).

There are plenty of parks around the city and most of these have playgrounds that give your smaller kids a chance to blow off some steam in between sightseeing.



If you're wondering where to eat with kids in Paris, there are various suitable options, namely brasseries. In addition to serving food at all hours (unlike restaurants which only open for dinner at 7 or 7:30 pm), brasseries serve more casual food that generally appeals to children, like croque-monsieurs sandwiches, roast chicken and fries, and pasta. Many brasseries also have kids' menus. Creperies are another great option that should work for everyone in your travel group.

# Our Paris guides

If you need further help to plan out your trip, check the following items:

## 3 to 6 days itineraries

Our [Paris Itineraries](#), created by a Paris expert who's lived in the city for over 20 years, are designed to help you make the most of your limited time in Paris, while seeing the major sights and exploring hidden gems.

Each itinerary includes a daily walking route with major landmarks, hidden gems, tours, restaurants, bars, and more along it that are totally worth experiencing.

Choose which recommendations match your taste, interests, and budget and follow the route with the help of a digital map.

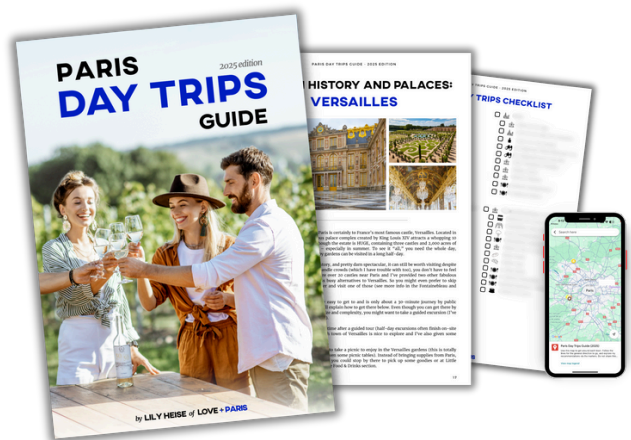


[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PARIS ITINERARIES](#)



## Paris Day Trips Guide

Looking to escape the city for a day or two? Our [Paris Day Trips Guide](#), crafted by a seasoned Paris expert, features seven incredible getaways just a train ride from the capital. Each trip includes everything you need including, how to get there, what to see, where to eat and insider tips to save time and money. No guesswork, no tourist traps—just seamless adventures beyond the city.



[Shop the Paris Day Trips Guide here](#)

Thanks for downloading the guide. Enjoy your trip 

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