



**PARIS
WEEKENDER'S
GUIDE TO WHERE
AND HOW TO
TAKE YOUR BEST
PHOTOS OF PARIS**



Paris Weekender's Guide to Where and How to Take Your Best Photos of Paris

Tip #1

Pay attention to the time of day and the weather.

The best time of day for outdoor photos is usually shortly after sunrise and shortly before sunset, when the light is softer and shadows are less harsh. Sunsets can be spectacular in Paris and in particular if there are a few clouds in the sky. But you need not limit yourself to taking photos only at these times. If you have some flexibility, keep these suggestions in mind:

Sunrise—head for the more open expanses:

- Bridges (**Pont des Arts** between the 6th and the Louvre in the 1st, **Pont Alexandre III** between the Grand Palais in the 8th and Les Invalides in the 7th, **Pont Neuf** at the tip of Ile de la Cité)
- Gardens (**Jardin de Luxembourg**)

Daytime—focus on indoor photos and smaller details

- If it's sunny, take some shots inside the various churches (**Sainte-Chappelle** or **Notre Dame** in the 1st) or the shopping arcades or *galleries* (**Galerie Vivienne** in the 2nd, **Passage des Panoramas** in the 9th, **Passage du Grand Cerf** in the 2nd), with the sun streaming in the windows.
- Especially in grayer weather, focus on the details: up-close shots of store windows when there will not be as much glare, up-close photos of flowers, architectural details, your favorite French foods

Sunset—again, head for your favorite bridge where you can capture as much sky as possible

- Another favorite spot of mine for evening photos is the **Carré du Louvre**. Grab a glass of Sancerre at **Le Café Marly** an hour or so before sunset and capture photos in the various stages of light: daylight, twilight, and nighttime with the courtyard lit up. If you can set your aperture, set it small (f/22 for example) to capture street lights that appear like stars. (This will also work with the sun, to show rays of light, if the sun is peeking through the trees or otherwise not too bright.)
- The rooftop café at Le Printemps in the 9th, **Café Deli-cieux**, offers an expansive view over the rooftops and of the back side of **Opéra Garnier**. Note, the café is only open until 7pm most evenings, but until 10pm on Thursday nights.

Night—if you have a tripod, you can capture some magnificent photos of the buildings and monuments lit up at night or the traffic whizzing by.

- **Notre Dame**, the **Eiffel Tower** and a number of other monuments in the city are spectacular at night, especially with a tripod
- If you have a tripod and you set your camera to a slower shutter speed, you can capture the action of the moving traffic. Of course the classic location for this is one of the small islands in the middle of the **Champs-Élysées**, looking at the **Arc de Triomphe** in the background. I also suggest the intersection of the Pont d'Arcole and the quai, with the **Hôtel de Ville** in the background.

Tip #2

Vary, vary, vary.

Vary everything: do not succumb to inertia, shooting robotically at every monument or street scene you pass. Change it up a little and do not be afraid to get creative (especially if you are shooting digital!) You can always buy a postcard to remind yourself what Notre Dame looks like—your photos should be from your personalized perspective and should capture your own memory of your visit.

Vary the angles

- Stand under the **Eiffel Tower** and shoot straight up
- On a busy pedestrian street (**rue Montorgueil** in the 2nd, the market on **Boulevard Raspail** in the 6th, **rue de Buci** in the 6th), hold the camera at hip level and angle it up when shooting
- Tilt the camera at an angle to capture a different feeling

Vary super up-close detail shots with more expansive views

- As outlined in **Tip #1**, vary your shots in part based on the amount and direction of the sunlight. Take photos that show the expanse of the sky or the rooflines (for example, from the rooftop café at Le Printemps in the 9th: **Café Deli-cieux**)
- Take up-close photos of flowers and details on the fountains and statues in the various gardens (for example, **Jardin de Luxembourg**).
- Take several photos of the same subject, some from far away and some up-close (for example, a street scene showing a number of buildings and then some up-close photos of the door handles or street signs)
- If you have an SLR with several lenses for your camera, bring them along!

Vary shutter speed to show action or car lights

- Go to one of the markets (Marché d'Aligre in the 12th) and set your camera to a slower shutter speed to capture the action of the marketplace.
- As suggested in **Tip #1**, bring your tripod to the **Champs-Élysées** or **Hôtel de Ville** at night and capture the stream of car lights.
- Capture the water from your favorite fountain at fast and slow (preferably with a tripod) shutter speeds to show the individual drops of water and the flow of the water, respectively. The **Fontaine de l'Observatoire** in the **Jardin Marco Polo** in the 6th is one of my top picks.

Vary the highs & lows

- Go under the **Eiffel Tower** and shoot up, then head to **Trocadero** in the 16th to shoot the monument from a higher vantage point.
- Go up to the rooftop café at Le Printemps in the 9th, **Café Deli-cieux**, and capture the rooftops of Paris.
- Go to **Montmartre** and shoot the crowds heading up or down the many staircases leading up to **Sacre Coeur**.

Tip #3

Use the props the city provides for you.

Look for reflections

- Incorporate reflections from car and motorcycle side mirrors and windshields
- Play with the reflections in shop windows (*boulangeries* and bookstores usually have photogenic windows—try roaming around the **Marais** or the pedestrian streets of **Montorgueil**)
- Look for reflections in puddles during and after rain (try the Champs de Mars under the **Eiffel Tower** after a rain shower).
- Look for reflections in fountains (the pools in the **Jardin de Luxembourg** and the **Jardin des Tuileries** are a good one for this)

Frame your photos

- Use doorways and windows to frame your shots
- Tree branches or rows of flowers can also serve as good frames for a part of the scene
- Capture some color in the foreground, but be careful not to compose a photo that is too busy, or with vibrant colors that pull the viewer's eye away from the main focus of the shot.
- If memorializing your favorite meals, do not be afraid to rearrange the table setting to create a composition that draws the eyes to the focus of the shot. And be sure to get a shot of your favorite wine bottle—if not to print for framing, to remember which wines you liked the most!

Tip #4

Be creative but purposeful when photographing people.

Decide in advance what the purpose of the photo is. Are you looking for the best portrait? Is your main focus the monument but with the person as foreground? Are you just looking for proof that the person was there?

You do not have to agree with me, but my personal preference is to either photograph the person or not. What do I mean by this? If I want a nice portrait, I take a shot up close (chest up), often with a blurred background (technique explained below). I pick a background that adds texture and that conveys the mood and memories of Paris, but that is not too colorful or unbalanced so as to distract from the subject. If, on the other hand, I want to tell a story about that person, I may stand back to capture more of the person's environment in the scene. But that environment should be relevant to the person and to the story and not overly busy. Finally, if my goal is to photograph a monument or a typical Parisian scene, I do not have a person pose in the corner. I believe this confuses the viewer about the message you are trying to convey.

Portraits of friends & family

- When shooting at sunset, be sure the sun is behind you (though not directly behind you such that your shadow falls in the photo), so the soft light highlights the faces of your subjects. The bridges are great spots for sunset shots: **Pont des Arts** between the 6th and the Louvre in the 1st, **Pont Alexandre III** between the Grand Palais in the 8th and Les Invalides in the 7th, **Pont Neuf** at the tip of Ile de la Cité.
- Avoid centering the people in the photo. Instead, leave space on one side to show a bit of Paris behind them. If photographing one individual, have him or her gaze slightly towards the open space, as the viewer will see the subject of the photo, then follow the gaze of that subject.
- If you can manually control your camera, set a large aperture (f/5.6 or f/8 for example) to blur the background slightly. Be sure the person's eyes are in focus.
- Take a few natural shots, not just posed shots. If you can make the person spontaneously laugh, that will often be your best photo.

Self portraits

- Experiment a bit. Just don't drop the camera! I enjoyed playing with self-portraits using Notre Dame in the background, as the façade makes for a pattern that does not draw away from the focal point of the photo, but at the same time it is still recognizable as **Notre Dame**, even with blurred a bit from using a large aperture.

Photographing strangers

- Note that France has stricter privacy protections than the U.S. relating to photographing individuals. If you wish to take identifiable photos of people on the street or photos in someone's shop, be sure to ask permission first. And don't take it personally when the first 10 people say "non".
- One option when photographing strangers is to use a slow shutter speed to blur the action a bit. You capture a mood and tell a story, but you do not take the same risk invading someone's privacy. For the best shots of the hustle and bustle of the city, go to one of the open-air markets such as **Marché d'Aligre** in the 12th.

Tip #5

Play with light and color.

Some of this comes at the time of composing and snapping the shot, and some comes in the post-snap processing (for those who like to play with Photoshop, Lightroom, Aperture or other such photo editing software programs).

Avoiding a washed out sky

- Most of the time, you don't want to overexpose your shot. On a bright sunny day, to avoid that washed-out sky that makes photos look so dull, here's a little trick if you're working only with a snap-and-shoot and there is nothing in the near foreground of your shot that needs to stay in focus: point your camera and the focal point in the viewfinder to the sky, push down half-way on the shoot button and hold it half-way down to lock in the focus, then frame/compose the photo correctly and snap.

Overexposure & other creative techniques

- With digital, you can take a number of shots and not worry about costs. Sometimes you want to overexpose for creative effect. Perhaps because the correctly exposed photo has harsh shadows or washed out highlights you cannot avoid, or perhaps just because it's a bit boring.

Turn some photos into black & white

- There's no reason to shoot in black & white with digital cameras. Shoot in color to preserve all your options. But when you get home, change the photo to black & white (i.e. put the color saturation at zero) with your photo editing software. This often works well for photos with washed-out or cloudy, gray skies. It also works well for storefront shots (for example, in the **Galerie Vivienne** in the 2nd, **Passage des Panoramas** in the 9th, or the **Passage du Grand Cerf** in the 2nd) and other street scenes (in the **Marais** or another older neighborhood of Paris, for example) to give the scene the feeling of an older era. And sometimes the scene or the background of the scene is distractingly colorful and black & white allows the viewer to focus on what is most important (for example, architectural details or the texture of the subject).

Tip #6

Observe, observe, observe!

Look for things out of place

- Look for surprising juxtapositions, for example, a mix of old and traditional with new and modern. I have oftentimes come upon colorful, funky cars in the older neighborhoods of Paris (**the 6th, the Marais**) that make for photos that draw in the viewer immediately.

Look for patterns

- Look for patterns of shapes, lines or colors that convey the feeling of a place. You may need to zoom in or out!

Look for reflections

- It is worth repeating the ideas in **Tip #3** here. Look for reflections in mirrors, glass windows, puddles and anything else that shines.

Look for people & anticipate their actions

- Although you should ask permission before photographing people as your subject, street and park scenes will necessarily capture people and their actions. Take a moment to survey the scene and anticipate people's movements. Would it add to or detract from this scene if a person were to pass by on a bike as I am shooting? Would it be more interesting to shoot this market stall with customers in front? There is always a lot of action at markets (for example, **Marché d'Aligre**) and also around Montmartre (outside the **Basilica of Sacré Coeur**, near the **carrousel** at the bottom of the stairs that lead to the Basilica, along the many **staircases**, around the **artists' stalls of Place du Tertre**).

Be creative

- As I mentioned in **Tip #4** on photographing people, do not just snap photos of the tourist sites, compose photos that tell a story. Use the famous Parisian landmarks as a backdrop, but think of a more creative story than "the Eiffel Tower is located here."

Below is a Quick Recap of My Favorite Locations for Capturing Paris on ~~Film~~ Pixels

- **Parks:** my favorites for photos are Jardin de Luxembourg and Jardin Marco Polo (Fontaine de l'Observatoire), Jardin du Palais Royal and Jardin des Tuileries
- **The bridges of the Seine:** in particular, Pont des Arts (on the bridge and also under the bridge on the quai), Pont Alexandre III, Pont Neuf
- **The shopping arcades or galeries:** in particular Galerie Vivienne, Passage des Panoramas and Passage du Grand Cerf
- **The markets:** in particular the Marche d'Aligre and the market on Boulevard Raspail in the 6th
- **Churches & cathedrals:** in particular Sainte-Chapelle for the stained glass windows and Notre Dame for its unmistakable façade
- **Montmartre:** the carrousel, Sacré Coeur, the artists' stalls, staircases
- **The Carré du Louvre:** the courtyard with the glass pyramids
- **Café Deli-cieux** (the rooftop café at Le Printemps at 66 blvd Haussmann in the 9th) for Paris's rooftops
- **The Eiffel Tower** from below and from Trocadero
- **Nighttime shots:** Champs-Élysées, looking at the Arc de Triomphe in the background. Also the intersection of the Pont d'Arcole and the quai, with the Hôtel de Ville in the background
- **Cute and bustling streets & shop windows:** the pedestrian area around rue Montorgueil in the 2nd, the older and narrower streets in the 6th and in the Marais
- **Your favorite restaurant:** capture some of your best memories: the outside of the restaurant, the food, the wine, your family or friends in a natural setting

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