

# Paris playground

Language students going to study in Paris will find a city of diversity, with historical monuments, modern theme parks and innovative events to discover in their free time. BETHAN NORRIS investigates some of the many attractions that Paris has to offer.

According to Francois Pfeiffer, Managing Director of Accord language school, students choose to go to Paris to learn French because they want to discover and enjoy “the cultural side of France”. While other areas of France, such as the Riviera, may offer fantastic beaches and a more tourist-oriented atmosphere, it is Paris where students go to experience some of the country’s best known museums, cultural attractions and historical sites, as well as typical French city life.

“Paris is 2,000 years old and there are many [remnants] of its history to visit,” says Eléonore Briard at France Langue, while Daniel Moriot from Eurocentres adds, “This city is like a myth [because of its many historical places of interest]. There is always something new [to see] every day.”

Some of the most famous sights include the Eiffel Tower, built to celebrate the centenary of the French revolution; Le Louvre, one of the biggest museums in the world; and Notre Dame cathedral, which has been a focal point for pilgrims for the last 2,000 years and was also the site of Napoléon’s coronation.

According to Pfeiffer, there is no shortage of guided tours for language

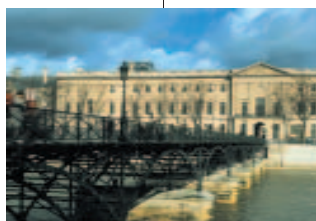
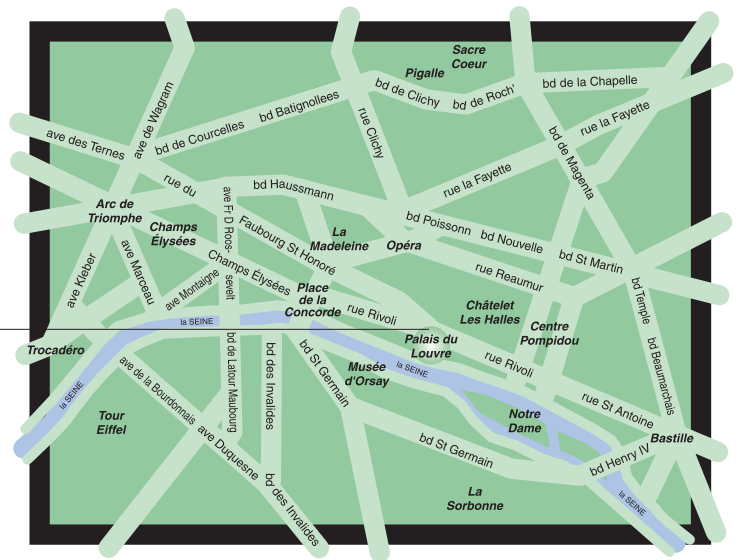
students to enrol on in order to visit these, and many other, tourist sites. “In Paris there are so many things to do that even Parisian people don’t have enough time

to enjoy [everything],” he says.

“There are many, many events [for] foreign students, in addition to more [typical options] such as guided visits of Le Louvre, guided visits of Montmartre, a boat cruise on the River Seine or a full day at Astérix Park or Disneyland Paris.”

Students at Eurocentres are encouraged

to learn about the famous landmarks in Paris by integrating them into lesson time. “We have some activities that [use] the city as part of the learning process,” reports Moriot. “The students familiarise themselves with one particular Parisian site. They will visit it and report [about it] in class.”



**The Louvre**  
One of the most famous museums in Paris, containing the Mona Lisa and Venus de Milo, the Louvre has so much to see that many return visits are needed. Collections are divided into seven departments

As well as being home to many tourist attractions, Paris also offers visitors the chance to get to know the day-to-day culture of local life. Concerts, exhibitions and other events are so numerous that Briard recommends that students buy a local listings magazine. “Every Wednesday, the students can buy one of two booklets – *L’Official des Spectacles* or *Pariscope* – where they find all the events in Paris [including] cinemas, museums, exhibitions, cruises on the Seine, theatre, ballet, concerts etc,” she says.

Small events like these happen daily throughout Paris, but there are also a number of larger events that take place every year and involve the whole city. “Paris has a very imaginative and dynamic mayor,” says

*Carousel with Sacre Coeur in the background in the Montmartre district (main picture)*

Sophie Rivière from Executive Language Services. “There are music festivals in the streets, cinema festivals and in the summer, Paris Plage, where the streets of the River Seine are transformed into a beach with many activities.”

The Paris Plage is one of Paris’ newest and most ambitious events, which was established in 2002 when the expressway along the bank of the Seine was closed to traffic for the summer months. Sand and palm trees were laid down for local people to sunbathe and relax next to the river.

Other popular Paris events that are organised include Le Bourget Air Show, the Tour de France, the French Tennis Open, a

Techno music parade in December and many summer cultural festivals. On the first Sunday of every month, all of Paris’ national museums are free to the public, while Briard also draws attention to the Nuit Blanche on the 4 October, when “many museums, swimming pools and exhibitions open all night long”.

For students exhausted by the non-stop Parisian lifestyle, Paul Webster from Berlitz Opéra recommends a rather more gentle pastime to get to know the city. “Just wandering around the city is an endless pleasure,” he says. “Paris is very walkable.”



**Book sellers along the Seine**

There are a number of open air stalls that sell books and artwork situated along the banks of the Seine, generally on the Left Bank. It is a popular pastime among Parisians to stroll here

Exploring Paris on foot means that students have a chance to find some of the city’s more hidden attractions that they might otherwise miss. Pfeiffer says that their school actively encourages students to discover some of the lesser known attractions of Paris. “For example, the Jardin Albert Kahn in Boulogne,” he says. “[This is a] fantastic garden where a Japanese garden is followed by a forest with blue trees, itself followed by a garden mixing roses and fruit trees. Other places to discover [include] the Parc des Buttes Chaumont, the Canal Saint-Martin and the Grands Boulevards.”

## Agent viewpoint

"We send our students to Eurocentres and they choose to study in Paris to learn French in a city of great culture and fashion. They enjoy the Parisian style of life."

**Ludmila Gauslaa, Språkreisebyrået, Norway**

"The main reason [students choose to study in Paris] is not the location but the programme we offer in hotel management. Participants can be placed all over France but they all demand Paris because this is the place students want to be able to say 'I've been and studied there. I know Paris'."

[Students enjoy] the Parisian way of life that offers many attractions and subtleties. They visit the main attractions during the first weeks and then stay in the district where they are [living] and begin to make the most of it."

**Damien Augier, Nacel International, UK/Spain**

"We send students to many destinations and Paris is one of the more popular ones. The main reasons for going on a language course to Paris are to develop French, experience a new culture, combine learning with having a good time and

refresh language skills before returning to university. Students usually know grammar and vocabulary but want to be more confident in speaking. Students usually socialise with other students from around the world. Paris is a cosmopolitan city with many tourist attractions. They go to museums, galleries [and on] organised trips by the school. [One problem is that] British students feel they don't practise enough French with other students from [Europe] as these students want to practise their English."

**Agnes Bailey, CIEE UK, UK**

The stunning architecture that can be found at many viewpoints around Paris has helped give Paris a reputation for being one of the world's most romantic cities, which is often an appeal for students. Moriot relates a story concerning a trip to St Germain with his students. "We stopped at the Pont des Arts and I said to the students, 'Just turn around and you will see only beauty'," he relates. "They did so and shared the same opinion. A few weeks later, I learnt that

two of my students set up a rendezvous on this bridge and embraced. I didn't ask for the rest of the story."

Moriot also underlines that Paris



### La Défense

This area is essentially a business park in Paris, where a number of modern office blocks are situated, including the famous Grande Arche, and works by famous artists are displayed

offers many opportunities for enjoyment outside the city, such as "cycling in the Boulogne woods, visiting the Castle of Versailles or going to Deauville to swim or windsurf."

Meeting and mixing with local people is often a daunting prospect for a foreigner in Paris, but

Webster at Berlitz says that the friendliness of locals is one of the little-known qualities about Paris. "When one makes the effort to speak French to Parisians, they often go out of their way to help," he asserts. "When they have been in Paris for a few days and speak only French with the hotel personnel, waiters and shopkeepers, students are pleasantly surprised to see that all of these people are quite happy to help them improve their French – correcting their mistakes and helping them to improve their vocabulary."

And meeting local people is made easier due to the local café culture, according to Moriot. "The café is the most popular place to socialise with French people," he says. □