

# Paris's possibilities

The River Seine runs through the heart of Paris and is a popular attraction



Trendy art galleries, elegant department stores, restaurants, parks and even a beach all combine to make Paris one of the world's favourite destinations, says JANE VERNON SMITH.

There is no single factor responsible for the undeniable allure of Paris. According to Delphine Crevelle of Education en France, "Students choose... Paris because it is the capital city of France and it is famous worldwide. Students - and their parents - choose it for its history, monuments, museums and architecture. Students also choose it for its cafés, restaurants and shops."

First settled in pre-Roman times, Paris has expanded outwards from its beginnings on the Île de la Cité – a small island in the middle of the River Seine – to form a city of more than two million inhabitants that is almost exactly circular in shape.

The predominant style and character of the modern city owes much to the 19th-

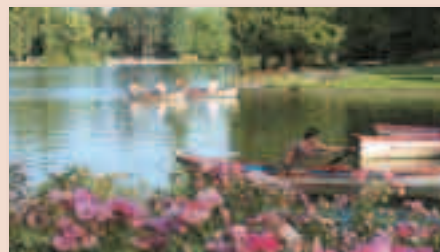


century urban planner, Georges Haussmann, who was responsible for many of the city's characteristic boulevards and monuments, including the Place Charles de Gaulle, the Arc de Triomphe (1) and the Opéra (2). However, more famous than any of these must surely be the 318-metre-high Eiffel Tower (3), built in 1889 to mark the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. "The Eiffel Tower is the symbol of the Parisians," says Sandrine Valadoux at the city's Ecole Perl. With its new lighting system, it is an even more impressive sight than in the past. "It is so romantic to stand anywhere down near the [tower] and see the lights turned on," claims Valadoux.

Although 19th century design has left an indelible mark on the city, the architecture of earlier times is still much in evidence. Saint-Chapelle is a magnificent example of 13th-century gothic architecture, while at the very heart of the city is the 12th-century Notre Dame cathedral (4). For Valadoux, the charm of Notre Dame lies in the atmosphere of the area, and its garden, "where, during warm days, you can enjoy a Bertillon ice cream, or simply picnic".

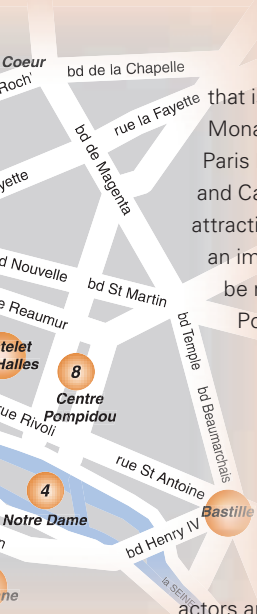
Another atmospheric monument is the 20th century basilica of the Sacred Heart (5), which dominates the city from the hill at Montmartre. "I just love the little cafés and terraces there," comments Valadoux. "What you will see there will give you a particular view of our capital and you'll see that Paris is really the most beautiful city in the world!"

Students also need time to do justice to Paris's many museums. Most famous of these is the Louvre (6), a former royal palace



#### Bois de Vincennes

Located in the eastern side of Paris, this wooded area was designed by Baron Haussmann in the style of Regent's and Hyde Park in London. The Daumesnil Lake is a popular attraction



that is now home to Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, the Mona Lisa. However, as Daniel Moriot of Eurocentres' Paris language school points out, the Rodin, Picasso and Carnavalet (story of Paris) museums are also major attractions, as well as the Musée d'Orsay (7), which houses an impressive collection of Impressionist art. Also not to be missed is the modern art collection at the Georges Pompidou Centre (8).

Even students who are regular visitors to Paris can always find something new to do, as Jérôme Serrat at ELFE, comments. "A Sunday spent at Longchamp or Auteuil racecourse is an ideal way to discover the world of horse racing," he suggests. Meanwhile, "A visit to the Père Lachaise cemetery plunges [students] back into the history of France's most eminent figures – artists, writers, actors and politicians, [and] literature aficionados should not miss a visit to the Musée de la Vie Romantique."

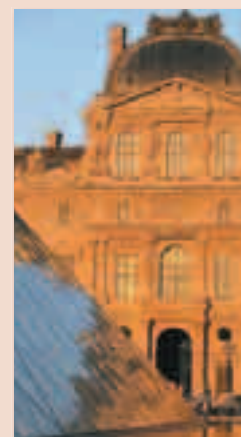
There is, of course, more to Paris than the sum of its historic monuments and museums. Within the city, there are a number of different areas with a special character of their own and, as Serrat points out, it is possible, even on a small budget, to get an authentic taste of Paris in all its different guises. "For a few euros, one can watch the city come alive by sitting outside a café."

Alternatively, some language schools offer organised visits to different areas of the city. Destinations for city walks organised by Eurocentres include the "very fashionable" Saint-Germain-des-Près and the Quartier Latin on the left bank of the Seine - home to the university, La Sorbonne, and populated by students, academics and artists. Here, students can have a drink in the lively bars or take a

morning jog or romantic stroll along the river. Also on the banks of the Seine are the *bouquinistes*, or second-hand bookstalls, where, notes Serrat, some real treasures are to be found. "One of our students, an avid postcard collector, came across a rare postcard of the 1900 Universal Exhibition," he reveals.

Fanny Rigaut of Langue Onze reports that her school also offers guided tours of another historic district, Le Marais. Originally a swamp, this area became the home of the Knights Templar in the 13th century and was subsequently taken over by French royalty before the building of the royal palace at Versailles. Today, it is a chic enclave with art galleries and designer clothes shops, as well as many bars, cafés and restaurants.

Another popular place to visit is the passages de Paris (covered arcades lined with shops), a place, according to Serrat, that is better experienced than described. "Very Parisian and exclusive" is Moriot's



**Musée du Louvre**  
Originally built as a fortress, this famous building eventually became the palace of Louis XIV. The Museum Central des Arts first opened in 1793 and welcomes six million visitors each year

PHOTOGRAPHS: PARIS TOURIST OFFICE



## Agent viewpoint

"Paris is a well known city in Turkey because of its beauty, fashion [and] movies. Therefore, students prefer to stay in the city they [have] mostly heard about. It is also easy to gain access to Paris from Istanbul and Ankara. [Students] first visit museums, bridges and the Eiffel Tower. And then they begin to be expert in Paris nightlife."

**Alper Karayama, Yakin Bati Educational Counseling Services, Turkey**

"We mainly deal with juniors, so they all stay on campus, [and] they go out only on visits and excursions organised by the local school. The number-one attraction is EuroDisney for juniors and the nightlife for adult students (apart from the main sights). Also, the adults enjoy walking in the city centre and along the Boulevard St Michel, and alongside the river banks and boat trips with the famous *Bateaux Mouche* (glass boats offering trips). Two weeks is not enough time to see Paris."

**Nikos Mantouvalos, Studytours, Greece**

"A Kub student who spent a week in Paris and now wants to spend a whole academic year at a lycée says, 'My generation likes Paris because it is 'in' and because we can put our spare time to the best use there. Paris is not merely a conglomerate of its famous historical mansions and monuments. It has a soul of its own. And of course, French fashion is unbeatable.' And, if I may add, our younger students, age 12 to 15, are sometimes attracted to the Paris area because of EuroDisney."

**Irina Kubik, Kub Travel Enterprises, Serbia & Montenegro**

summing up of the passages. With entrances that cannot be seen from the street, these haunts are often missed by casual visitors, but students at both ELFE and Eurocentres are offered the chance of an organised visit. Paris still retains its reputation for shopping and, in addition to the numerous small boutiques, there is also a good choice of larger stores. "*Au Bonheur des Dames*, the famous novel by Emile Zola, is a must-read before paying a visit to popular stores like Bon Marché, Printemps or Galeries Lafayette," notes Serrat.

Paris is also a great place to relax. "Paris has so many great cafés, bars and clubs," enthuses Crevelle. "Some areas, such as the Latin Quarter or Bastille, are very lively nightspots and fun places for the students to go [to] have a drink and dance. Of course," she adds, "students also love all of Paris's evening entertainment. There are theatres showing classical and modern plays, [and] movie theatres with all the latest movies."

In summer, a three-kilometre stretch of beach with palm trees created

on the banks of the Seine, Paris Plage, adds to the city's appeal.

The parks come alive with bands playing music, dance shows and all sorts of entertainment. There are also a number of annual events that take place across the city. Among the highlights are La Nuit des Musées in mid-May, when most museums are open until late at night and offer free admission, and the traditional Fête de la Musique in June, when musical performances take place all over the city. ●



### Opéra Garnier

Built between 1862 and 1865 by Charles Garnier, the Paris Opera is now devoted to the performance of ballets after a new opera house was built in Bastille. Its hallway has Chagall paintings on the ceiling