

48 Hours in

→ Paris

The most popular tourist destination in the world, *La Ville-lumière*, the City of Light, is a place of lovers and painters, intellectuals and bohemians, and some of the finest shopping anywhere in Europe. Take a weekend break to Paris to reveal its secrets, both ancient and modern.

Words by **NICK RYAN**

THE EIFFEL TOWER

DAY 1:

→ 09:00

Paris is a city split and defined by its great river, the Seine. The waters down which the Vikings once sailed now pass beneath iron footbridges and the stone of La Pont Neuf – painted by Rodin and a feature of numerous films – before flowing around the Île de la Cité, past the famous church of Notre Dame and out towards its mouth at Rouen.

This is a good place to get your bearings. The north or right bank of the river was traditionally the richer, grander side, and the left the poorer and more avant garde. Getting around is easy: Buy a 'carnet' (10 tickets) and use the Metro, bus or RER trains.

→ 10.00-15.00

Take a walk from your hotel – Paris is a city best experienced on foot – or an open-top bus tour around the city. Your two-hour ride will take you past all the main sights, including the Champs-Élysées, the Eiffel Tower, Sacré Coeur, the museum at the Louvre, Notre Dame, and the Pompidou Centre. The Cityrama tour allows you to hop on and off the bus at stops around the city over two days.

After getting your bearings, hop out at Montmartre and the

famous church of Sacré Coeur, and gaze down at the city below. The church's acoustics are outstanding – attending a service here is well worth it. Then amble down the steep cobbled hill to Montmartre, home to street artists and buskers. This is where Picasso, as a penniless artist, sold his paintings for meals; nowadays you have to pay for the food, but a three-course meal with a glass of wine won't set you back much. On your way, stroll past the famous Moulin Rouge, which still hosts nightly can-can cabaret.

→ 16.00

Head into Le Marais for a spot of window shopping. Once a favourite of French kings, it fell into decline after the Revolution but is back in fashion and the old royal mansions have been restored. Wander down Rue St Antoine, one of Paris' oldest streets and once used for jousting. Henri II was fatally wounded here by a lance in 1559 when a wedding party for his daughter got a bit out of hand.

As a Jewish area, look out for some amazing bakeries, although it tends to be quieter on Saturdays.

→ 19.00

As dusk approaches, head towards Place Vendôme, via Tuileries Gardens near the Louvre museum. Down rue Daunou, a side street not far from the Ritz, is Harry's Bar – Hemingway's old haunt and the birthplace of the Bloody Mary drink is a fitting place to end your evening in style.

THE SEINE



ARC DE TRIOMPHE



THE LOUVRE



DAY 2:

→ 09.00

For something different, head over to Père-Lachaise Cemetery (Cimetière du Père-Lachaise), one of the most visited cemeteries in the world. It's a fascinating experience to wander the cracked but magnificent tombstones and mausoleums of the famous. Jim Morrison's grave/shrine is here, as is Oscar Wilde's once-desecrated statue, and singer Édith Piaf's tomb.

→ 12.00

The call of the Rive Gauche – the Left Bank – makes the Latin Quarter a must-see. It's lost a little of its bohemian charm, with the advent of cheap, touristy restaurants haggling for your trade, but La Maison de Verlainne does a fine kir (a mixture of white wine and cassis) as part of its 'menu' dinner, which includes the ubiquitous French onion soup, steak au poivre and luscious profiteroles.

Near the river step inside Shakespeare and Company. Paris' most famous bookstore also operates as a lending library. Breathe in the atmosphere of literary greats and the era of jazz as you thumb between the tomes. The upstairs also serves as a makeshift dormitory for travellers, known as 'tumbleweeds', who earn their keep by working in the shop for a couple of hours each day.

→ 16.00

Further south are the Catacombs, a network of subterranean tunnels and rooms. An eerie spot to reflect on the city's grim war and plague-ridden past while reflecting on how the French Resistance once hid beneath the streets.

→ 18.00

By now the lure of the high-class shops and restaurants of the Champs Élysées should be irresistible. Delve into the perfumeries or admire the designer stores. Le Touquet's will feed you like a prince – and charge like one – otherwise grab a street baguette and Orangina for small change.

As night approaches, take a tour up the Arc de Triomphe, built by Napoleon to celebrate his military victories and now a monument to past French soldiers. From here gaze out and soak up the myriad of twinkling lights as Paris comes alive once more. ■



PLACE DE VENDRÔME



JEWISH BAKERY



OSCAR WILDE'S TOMB



RUE ST ANTOINE



CATACOMBS



MONTMARTE RESTAURANTS