

Advertorial: Paris Ile-de-France Regional Tourist Board
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Title: On centre stage

Lead: Paris's relentless spirit for cultural innovation has yielded some fine new urban treasures – and they complement the city's established ones extremely well.

What is it that makes Paris so magical? Certainly, the city's grandeur of scale is a powerful factor. Whether you stand at the Arc de Triomphe gazing down the two kilometre-long Champs-Élysées, or stare up at the towering façade of the Opéra Garnier, or take in the Seine's majestic curve from the Pont Neuf bridge, the sheer immensity of Paris's every cultivated inch is jaw-dropping.

Paris also excels at detail. Tucked within its ornate *arrondissements* are some 141 museums, along with thousands of intricately conceived boutiques, specialty stores, designer hotels, bistros, cafés, bars and regal Renaissance-era apartments.

In the Opéra Garnier and Île de la Cité areas, the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay are tightly flanked by French Gothic and Renaissance wonders including the Notre-Dame cathedral, the mansions of Île Saint Louis and dozens of formal gardens. It's a scene fixed in the world's imagination – even among punters who've never been here.

But not all of Paris's attractions are historic: the city is a known innovator. In recent years alone, Paris has built scores of attractions designed in bold new styles, complementing its new, eco-friendly infrastructure: a new light rail system and about 30 new parks. Next time you visit Paris, be sure to bookmark everything that's fresh and innovative alongside your favourite old-world haunts.

Areas in flux – Left Bank and Trocadéro

A host of internationally relevant developments have concentrated in the Trocadéro quarter near the Champs-Élysées, already home to the edgy Palais de Tokyo gallery and the Musée Guimet, which has a sizeable collection of Asian and Classical art. First, the Musée du Quai Branly (www.quaibranly.fr) opened in 2006. Housing 3,500 outstanding artefacts from all four corners of the globe, this edifice displays everything from masks and tapa from Oceania, costumes from Asia and musical instruments from Africa.

Then, September 2007 saw the reopening of the behemoth architecture museum, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (www.citechaillot.fr). Spectacularly converted after a 10-year renovation, the museum has a hillside position with sweeping views over the Seine and Eiffel Tower. Its three galleries are divided according to theme, with reproductions of major medieval, gothic and Renaissance buildings in one, and architectural artworks and frescoes in another. The Galeries d'Architecture Moderne et Contemporain displays models of leading 20th and 21st century buildings by the likes of Le Corbusier and Renzo Piano.

In September 2008, a new fashion and design center, La Cité de la Mode et du Design (www.paris.fr) will open on the Seine's Left Bank. The three-story dockside warehouse has been converted by Paris-based architects Dominique Jakob and Brendan Macfarlane, and will host the fashion school L'Institut Français de la Mode, along with an exhibition space,

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music production studios, a bookstore, cafés and a restaurant. Needless to say, fashion shows will be a regular drawcard here.

Don't confuse it with the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (www.lesartsdecoratifs.fr), also in the vicinity, an inspirational space that houses four museums dedicated to different aspects of the decorative arts, including its own fashion and textiles museum.

Queen of arts

Other areas in Paris have swelled to accommodate diverse, new arts venues too.

October 2008 sees the opening of the spectacular contemporary arts venue, Le 104 or Cent Quatre (www.le104.fr), in the city's north-east. Dramatically converted from the Service Municipal des Pompes Funèbres building, this cavernous site is slated to hold multiple events, exhibitions and some 30 artist-in-residence programs annually. Le 104 will offer a non-stop calendar of cutting-edge art.

In fact, art audiences have a feast of exhibitions this year. The avant-garde installation Hotel Everland, by Swiss art duo Sabina Lang and Daniel Baumann, will remain atop the Palais du Tokyo museum until 31 December, 2008. This smart little space-age capsule was conceived with the ultra-hip Hotel Sezz nearby and it boasts stunning views across the Eiffel Tower and Champs-Élysées. If you miss out on staying (there's a strict one-night policy), you can inspect it during gallery hours.

In June, esteemed American sculptor Richard Serra completes an installation for the Nef du Grand Palais as part of its Monumenta contemporary artist-in-residence series, which hosted Anselm Kiefer in its inaugural programme in 2007. Even if you visit after Serra is back in New York, you can view a wealth of material illustrating his creative process while in Paris. The work itself exemplifies the sculptor's talent for imbuing industrial materials with poetry. And mark your diary for early 2010, when French artist Christian Boltanski takes up the next Monumenta challenge.

Photography aficionados will already know that Paris is eking out a reputation as the world's premier photography showcase. Each October it holds the prestigious Paris Photo fair (www.parisphoto.fr) and the biennial Le Mois de la Photo; the latter has greatly expanded in scale, and its maverick photography stars sell their work from prices of 500 euros up to 80,000 euros. The show comprises 70 to 80 individual shows presented by institutions dedicated to photography, including the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (www.mep-fr.org), Jeu de Paume (www.jeudepaume.org) and Fondation Henri Cartier Bresson (www.henricartierbresson.org).

Also in October, several new collection pieces will be unveiled at Mac/Val (www.macval.fr), the spectacular contemporary arts museum that opened on Paris's outskirts in 2005 and has an impressive 1500 pieces of contemporary French art.

From dusk 'til dawn

[BREAKOUT BOX]

Groovy Paris

Top 3 indulgences

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- Discovering exclusive fashions, photos, art and product designs by emerging talents
- Slipping into a bikini or board shorts on the Seine during Paris Plages
- Hanging out at Le 104 – touted as the world's hottest new art incubator

From summer through late autumn, Paris practically doesn't go to sleep.

Soon after the buzz of the French Open in May at the Stade de Roland Gaross, where the likes of Rafael Nadal and Justine Henin (last year's winners) will battle against newer upstarts, Parisians live it up at the La Fête de la Musique (www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr) on June 21. The festival was begun in 1982 to bring music into a 'level' public arena, by encouraging amateurs and professional musicians alike to perform wherever they like. It has blossomed into a sophisticated programme of free concerts, and spawned more than a hundred derivative events across the globe.

Then, in August, an artificial beach is created along Seine River for Paris Plages – or 'Paris seaside' (www.paris.fr). Visitors can take dance lessons, swim in floating pools on the Seine or just chill out on a rented deck chair. Also in August is the Rock en Seine festival, which has seen such big names as Björk, Amy Winehouse, Arcade Fire and The Jesus and Mary Chain command the stage. Check the website closer to the date for details of this year's lineup.

Mellow listening can be had at Salle Pleyel (www.sallepleyel.fr), one of Paris's most esteemed performance spaces. The original Art Deco interior has been modernised, lifting its acoustic performance to highest levels of clarity and depth. Famous names to have performed here include Igor Stravinsky, Louis Armstrong and Ravi Shankar. Classical music concerts are scheduled almost every second day in autumn, and there are several non-classical highlights too: French electronic group Air (October) and experimental jazz musician Trilok Gurtu (November) included.

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Dreamy Christmases

Classic French customs and a magical mood combine at Christmas in Paris. Main thoroughfares such as the Champs-Élysées, and sites such as the Church de la Madeleine, come aglow with thousands of tiny Christmas lights. An ice-skating rink is set up outside the Hôtel de Ville, a giant Christmas tree is rigged up in front of the Notre-Dame cathedral, and squares all through the town fill with open-air markets selling unusual Christmas decorations, regional specialities and handmade gifts. Some of the bigger markets are La Défense, Place Saint-Sulpice, Marché Saint-Germain and Les Féeries d'Auteuil, which even holds a concert.

Stylish spots to stay

Paris is one of the world's great hotel cities, and it's worth doing your homework to find something special. For old-world European elegance, think the exclusive Hotel Meurice, the recently extended Hotel Bristol or the Plaza Athénée, all of them host to a star-studded international clientele. The Shangri-La, opening in July 2009, will add to the high-end choices.

For chic little private spaces, Paris has some fantastic choices. The

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Christian Lacroix-designed Hôtel du Petit Moulin in the Marais is a treat, with quirky wallpapers and glamorous fabrics lining a 17th century bakehouse, and top service to boot. Other glam boutique stays include the Jardins du Marais (www.homeplazza.com), its neo-romantic interior conceived by Philippe Starck and furnished with his slick designs; the slick, high-tech environs of Pavillon Nation (www.hotelsparis.fr); and the classically Parisian Hotel Keppler (www.exclusive-hotels.com), resplendent in black and white with just a splash of colour.

For extended stays, the Adagio (www.adagio-city.com) portfolio of handsome short-term apartments from Pierre & Vacances ensures equal parts style and equal parts good value. Citadines (www.citadines.com) is another good choice.

Cosmopolitan dining

Paris still rivals any other destination worldwide when it comes to haute cuisine. Some classic and unfailingly superb choices are Taillevent, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon and Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée.

And there are always some hot new openings. Recently, much buzz has centred on L'Absinthe, on the Place du Marché St Honoré (www.restaurantabsinthe.fr), where a flotilla of young talents marries together French flavours such as foie gras and terrines with pan-European spices. Heading the team is Caroline Rostang – culinary royalty, being the daughter of master chef Michel Rostang. Its groovy interior has taken a cue from the classic bistro with chequerboard tiles, ~~moody~~ timber panelling and exposed brick walls.

Another hot topic is Le Jules Verne, the Eiffel Tower's historic dining room, where Alain Ducasse has masterminded a moody makeover. Head chef Pascal Féraud executes a menu that blends French fine dining with a worldly take on top-notch ingredients.

Also nearby, at Le Cristal Room in the Maison Baccarat, designer Philippe Starck and painter Gérard Garouste have created a glittering Baroque interior. In it, chef Thierry Burlot serves seasonal haute cuisine made from fine ingredients such as Guilvinec scampi and Mediterranean red tuna.

A lavishly stocked wine cellar is de rigeur at such establishments, but if you can't get enough of a particular drop, you might just find it at Lavinia. The retail giant promises some 6,000 French and international labels, and even has a gorgeous wine bar and restaurant to sample them in. Visitors can sample degustation courses, too, in a true *atelier gastronomique* [NOTE ITALICS] atmosphere – sophisticated dining in an open-kitchen setting, currently all the rage in Paris.

More forms of *nouvelle cuisine* can be experienced at the city's many food festivals – Le Fooding, held in summer and autumn, is a great place to start (www.lefooding.com).

There's another fun way to experience French food: by learning to shop, cook or serve it. La Belle Ecole – which teaches pupils how to savour the finer aspects of French living – you can take short courses such as wine appreciation, shopping at markets, French cooking and floral arrangement.

The art of shopping

Paris's ever-seductive shops overflow with exclusive, beautiful wares sourced from the world over: fashions for men and women, homewares,

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personal care products, sleek electronics and more.

Status-seekers can hit the international ateliers along the rue Faubourg St Honoré, Champs-Élysées and avenues Georges V and Montaigne – 2007 saw a wave of high-end openings. Meanwhile, the city's department stores offer a stupendous array of choices. Printemps is jam-packed with top international and French labels, while its women's shoe department is reputedly the largest in Europe at 3,000 sq m. The store's only real rival is the equally fashion-forward Galeries Lafayette, offering acres of gorgeous fashions for men, women, home and children.

Rub shoulders with the city's style mavens at Colette on rue Faubourg St Honoré, known for its discerning collection of edgy clothing designs, sexy new gadgets and hipper-than-hip places to eat, drink and people-watch. Come January, these stores – and hundreds more of Paris's finest retailers – offer discounts of 30, 40 and even 50 percent.

Or go fossicking for vintage treasures at the St Ouen Flea Market. Nearly 2000 stallholders here offer a compelling jumble of everything from antique tapestries to Art Deco objets d'art, vintage clothes, books and furniture.

While most of the city's prestigious biannual prêt-a-porter fashions shows are off-limits to the general public, one does offer a public day, and plenty of food for thought: the Ethical Fashion Show (www.ethicalfashionshow.com). Nearly 100 labels – from Brazil, Bolivia and beyond – showcase their jewellery, clothing and accessories manufactured under flawless environmental and humane conditions.

For further information:

Comité régional du Tourisme Paris Ile-de-France

www.pidf.com

The regional tourist board offers four information desks at International Airport Roissy Charles de Gaulle, open daily 6.30am to 11.30pm.

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Dates to remember

Jun 21: Fête de la Musique, various locations, www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr

Aug 2: Rock en seine, Saint-Cloud www.rockenseine.com

Mid Aug: Paris Plages, various locations along the Seine www.paris.fr

Sept 26 – Jan 9, 2009: Andrea Mantegna retrospective, Musée du Louvre www.louvre.fr

September : Technoparade, www.technopol.net

Oct 6 – Jan 5 : Picasso et les Maîtres, Grand Palais, www.rmn.fr

October: Nuit Blanche, various locations, www.paris.fr

December: Paris illuminations and Christmas events, www.paris.fr

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January 2009: Sales in Paris, www.parisinfo.com

Oct 23 – 26: FIAC contemporary art fair, Grand Palais and Louvre, www.fiac.com

Oct 10 – Jan 25: Jackson Pollock, Pinacothèque, www.pinacothèque.com

Oct 14 – Ethical Fashion Show, www.ethicalfashionshow.com

Nov 20 – Apr 19, 2009: Fashions of Sonia Rykiel, Les Arts Décoratifs www.lesartsdecoratifs.com

Apr 22 – Jun 1 (2009): La Force de l'Art, Grand Palais, www.rmn.fr

Jan – Feb 2010: Christian Boltanski at Monumenta 2010, www.monumenta.com

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