



# Paris - the city for (food) lovers

Whether it's a hot chocolate and croissant as a snatched breakfast at a 'zinc' café or a silver service dinner at a Left Bank brasserie, or all the other eating opportunities in between; there's nowhere quite like Paris if you love food. *Dave Reeder* helps you plan a gourmet break

**W**hen Ernest Hemingway famously spoke of Paris as 'a moveable feast', he wasn't imagining a day spent wandering the streets in search of great food, but the idea seems irresistible to me.

Paris is, of course, a city of culture, a city for lovers and a shining city on the hill for artists and writers. Okay, been there, done that. Now, what's to eat?

There's an argument that Lyon is the gastronomic heart of France, but Paris is the place that counts: for ambitious chefs in search of Michelin stars, for retailers of specialist produce, for the gastro-intelligentsia and, of course, for simple lovers of French food.

So, eating in Paris is a food lover's delight, right? Well, sadly, not always.

Let me guide you through the things to avoid and the things to embrace when eating in Paris, plus give you some ideas for one of the most exciting Paris holidays – renting a self-catering apartment and cooking like a Parisian. So, to table.

## *How to eat badly...*

The quickest way of eating badly in Paris is to be a tourist. Sure, like any major city, there are lots of poor places to eat and you'd shun them in Paris as you would in London or Melbourne and, equally, you'll tut-tut like the rest of us at the growth of 'le fast food' and McDo culture.

No, the places to avoid are the busy restaurants near all the key spots – hey, full of diners, so must be okay, right? Actually, I don't think so and my two absolute commandments of Parisian dining are to walk quickly past any restaurant offering a multi-language menu or a menu with photos of the dishes.

You may have a decent meal, but why take the risk of a bad one – besides, who wants to eat in Paris surrounded by loud groups of tourists reliving their morning at the Louvre? And,

talking of the Louvre, the food court there is absolutely the number one place to avoid – it is unbelievably bad.

The reason for shunning tourist spots, and number one amongst these I count the Champs-Elysees, which acts as a magnet for tourists – is simply that the majority of customers are one-meal wonders. They eat, they move on and they don't return. If you were a restaurateur with that clientele, would you focus on developing stunning food or on maximising your profits? Exactly.

Next guarantee for a bad meal is to eat like an American – apologies here to my American friends! By that, I mean trying to eat as if you're back home – demanding menu substitutions, drinking Coca-Cola and speaking too loudly in English. The reason why Parisians have the reputation of being bad-mannered is precisely because so many tourists are incredibly obnoxious in their behaviour. Behave like them and you'll eat badly – it's as simple as that.

Finally, remember that the pricey drink at a café is buying you real estate not just the drink; you are welcome to sit and watch the world go by for an hour or more for the price of a coffee or glass of wine.

### *How to eat well...*

The secret of eating well in Paris lies in eating like a Parisian.

Firstly, understand that to the French in general and Parisians in particular, food is a very serious business. It is something to be savoured, enjoyed and lingered over. That's partly why seeing people eating as they walk in the streets is unusual; that's certainly why you should never, ever try to catch

one last 'quick' lunch on a Sunday with frequent glances at your watch as check-in time at the airport approaches.

And, most of all, food is a communal pleasure; although in my experience solitary, serious diners are always treated with respect.

So here is your number one lesson: look on dining as a serious process run by professionals and you'll get the greatest benefit and pleasure. For a start, the maitre d' and the waiting staff treat their job as a real career and they take pride in what they do, so respect them. Don't make the schoolboy mistake of snapping your fingers and calling out "garçon!", for example.

Entering a restaurant, make eye contact, be polite, throw in a "Monsieur" and take the opportunity of being shown to your table as a good moment to demonstrate that this is part of a process in which you understand the rules. Want to sit outside? Of course. Want to have a view of the room from the banquette? Just say so.

And, when the menu arrives, at least have thought if you want a pre-meal drink, because that will be the first automatic question. Don't dither. If you just want water, don't be afraid to ask for "un carafe d'eau" instead of pricey bottled water. You're the customer and, if you demonstrate your knowledge of the game, then you'll get great service.

Rule number two – unless you have a serious medical condition, do not ask for substitutions on a set menu. Every restaurant will have daily menus, based on the chef's whim and the best buys from the market: if the fish course is sole meuniere then don't ask for truite amandine, order from the a la carte menu instead – it's as simple as that.

### *The top chef's top tip*

**"I eat at Clos des Gourmets two or three times a week when I'm in Paris. They only use seasonal ingredients and always add a touch of wackiness to very classic dishes. I suppose it's new classic French cuisine. Unbelievable."**

Michel Roux Sr.  
Le Clos Des Gourmets



## *My secret addresses*

Okay, I've had my arm twisted. Nothing works in Paris better than personal recommendation, so here are the places in Paris I return to again and again, in no particular order. And, if I can't find a seat in the future, I know who to blame...

I'm a complete sucker for the classic Parisian brasserie – old-fashioned décor, classic menus, magically professional service. Wepler is one of the best and I've been a fan since I saw a queue of Parisians collecting giant shellfish platters one Christmas morning. Onion soup, bouillabaisse and sauerkraut are classic or go wild with crayfish in cherry sauce.

### **Wepler**

14 place de Clichy, 18e

A new favourite – I was drawn by news of a redesign by Philippe Starck – this is a great spot for a fast and stylish pause. The menu swings between healthy: fresh juices and sinful: ice cream with fudge and dark chocolate

### **Paradis de Fruit**

47 ave Georges V, 8e

Amazing art and great food, Georges at the Centre Pompidou is still one of the capital's hot tables some years after opening, helped in part by great views over the city as much as its world cuisine and funky décor.

### **Georges**

Centre Pompidou, Level 6, place Pompidou, 4e

The French don't do fusion food very well, but they celebrate their colonial past at this Vietnamese restaurant. Popular and reasonably priced with a great neighbourhood vibe.

### **Coin des Gourmets**

39 rue Mont Thabor, 1e

Think a bouillon is just a soup? Think again, it's also the word for the classic workers' soup kitchen and, thankfully, Chartier keeps the tradition alive. A protected interior, magnificently gruff service and astonishingly cheap meals – three courses and a bottle of house red for under Euro 20!

### **Chartier**

7 rue de Fauborg-Montmartre, 9e

Somewhat overshadowed in many people's minds for a long time by the iconic Café des Deux Magots opposite, this classic brasserie is now delivering again on its promise of great food, served quickly and impeccably. Just watching the waiters at work is a pleasure.

### **Brasserie Lipp**

151 boulevard Saint-Germain, 6e

A friendly neighbourhood bistro that is usually my first stop in Paris. Dependable, great shellfish and unhurried atmosphere despite the crowds. A favourite for many chefs. Don't miss the fully laid table struck upside down on the ceiling – don't ask why!

### **Le Ballon des Ternes**

103 avenue des Ternes, 17e

This place you'll either love or hate. Eat family-style on communal tables on cheap classic fare, serving yourself from the stove and picking wine from the racks around the small space. A big hit with a number of leading American food critics.

### **La Cave de l'Os a Moellee**

181 rue de Lormel, 15e

If you follow Chef Gagnaire's shopping advice (see box out) then you'll be drawn to the Lena street market. If you're a fan of Princess Diana then you'll be drawn to the Pont d'Alma and her memorial. Either way, stop for lunch at this informal and (for the area) reasonable seafood place, next door to the more upscale Marius et Janette. On a sunny day, it feels like the south of France, despite the glimpses of the Eiffel Tower through the trees! Go for the daily specials.

### **Le Petit Marius**

6 avenue George V, 8e

Finally, a real find, so please leave a seat for me! A tiny fishmonger close to the Saint Honore market but right at the back, past the stunningly fresh displays, are half a dozen seats and a seagull soundtrack. Tiny menu, amazing food, fascinating ambience. The fishmongers are happy to chat but they're usually run off their feet by hordes of hungry shoppers. Great for a light lunch and the Jardin des Tuileries are a couple of minutes away for a lazy afternoon.

### **L'Ecume Saint Honore**

6 rue du Marche Saint Honore, 1e



Next, ask questions. Professional staff will delight in responding to them – how is this dish prepared? What wine would you recommend? And so on.

You may find, in some restaurants, that the tables are set very close together. This does not mean that you have to intertract with your neighbours – a slight nod as you sit down and perhaps a quiet “Bon appetit” when their main courses arrive is more than enough. They will respect your privacy also.

So where will you find the perfect meal? I have a simple rule of thumb, developed over two or three visits to Paris a year since I was in my early 20s: 30 percent of your meals should see you return to places you really enjoy, 30 percent should be recommendations (more on that in a moment) and 30 percent should be fortuitous finds. The other 10 percent? A picnic, a quick sandwich in a bar or clutching your over-worked stomach on your hotel bed...

Finding new places to eat is simple. Before anything, get yourself the latest Michelin guide to Paris restaurants – as well as the starred establishments, the fertile hunting ground is what is known as the Bib' restaurants, named after Bibendum, the Michelin tyre-man mascot. These are smaller, cheaper, great quality places often opened by chefs who trained with a master but see no immediate opportunity of running a 3-star place. Frequently out of the way, they may offer great regional food, for example.

Next, check the press and internet ([www.lefooding.com](http://www.lefooding.com) is great) for the new openings, but be prepared to fight half of Paris for seats if the place is hot. Ask friends who've been to Paris recently to suggest places they like – I'm sharing a number of my favourites for you in a box out, which may help.

Lastly, keep your eyes open. If you are sightseeing and are hungry, then walk a street or two away from the tourist joints and see what you can find. Think of the way Paris works – wherever there's a food market, there will be interesting options.



# Norwegian Christmas Table

December 14th – 22nd The Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek hosts its very own Norwegian Christmas Table and offers the chance to all diners to win a trip for 2 persons to Oslo courtesy of SAS Airlines and a 3 nights stay for 2 at the Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel, Oslo.

Guest Chef Therese Lillevik of the Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel, Oslo flying in all the way from Norway, will present all diners with an array of traditional Norwegian festive specialties on a lavish dinner buffet for only Dhs. 145 per person, at Boulvar restaurant, located on the ground floor.

SAS

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Baniyas Road, P.O. Box 476, Dubai UAE  
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One thing to remember is that French life is changing. The old, multi-course, structured lunch is on the way out – hey, we’re busy people now! Look too for the increasing number of health-conscious menus (bio). And don’t pass up the multiple opportunities for picnics – a baguette and cheese, slices of quiche or salads from a specialist shop, fruit tarts and a screwtop bottle of wine as you linger in the Jardins de Luxembourg – sorted.

Easier to find too these days is non-French food – Indian around the passage Brady, Chinese and South-East Asian in the 13e and Belleville, Japanese around rue Sainte-Anne, Moroccan in Ménilmontant, South American on the montagne Sainte-Geneviève and Africa/Caribbean in the Chateau-Rouge area.

Finally, if you are on the Michelin star trail, note that many of the major chefs have more than one outlet – by eating at, for example, L’Atelier de Joel Robuchon instead of La Table, you’ll get the master’s touch but still have some Euros left in your wallet! And many fine dining restaurants are now offering special, more affordable menus at different times in response to economic downturn – do your internet research before you arrive in Paris.

### *How to get the best...*

Once you’ve been to Paris a couple of times and got the feel of the place, then as a foodie you’ll be consumed by the frustration of being surrounded by amazing produce in the markets and shops, but unable to cook any of it. Pate or cheese on a baguette in your hotel room just doesn’t satisfy your inner chef.

The answer is simple: take the plunge and, for your next trip, rent a self-catering apartment ([www.parisattitude.com](http://www.parisattitude.com), for

### *View from the top*

Chef Pierre Gagnaire manages to straddle with ease the twin horses of eminence grise of the Emirates’ restaurant scene (with his Reflets in the Dubai Festival City InterContinental now recognised as one of the top ten restaurants in the world) and enfant terrible of the French avant garde food scene (albeit with four Michelin stars for his Parisian outlets).

Perhaps more importantly, he is a man of passion and of a relentless drive for quality.

Who better then to ask for advice on eating out in his adopted city – given that his restaurants are stations on any serious gastro tour of Paris?

#### **What for you represents the essence of eating badly in Paris?**

A sandwich on the Champs-Elysees. However, there are good places nearby – not just my restaurant! You know, some places in Paris are now impossible. If you want to see Montmatre, go at 5am – after that, impossible.

So how should one of our readers choose a good restaurant? I think some planning is required. Look, the best places, they don’t really change – chefs stay a long

time, so you can think ahead and, of course, make your reservations ahead of time from Dubai. For the smaller addresses, it is a little more work. A single review – well, the critic may have had one extra glass of wine, the owner’s wife may have smiled at him, they’re human. So I would suggest taking three guides – Michelin, Lebey and Pudlo Paris – and look for a convergence of opinion. But in Paris you must remember that quality is not cheap and fashion can be very expensive!

#### **Do you have favourite addresses you would share with us?**

To be very honest with you, I don’t eat out very often – I just do not have the time. With my family, my wife takes us to a trattoria for pizza – it’s not for me, but our kids enjoy it. Yes, I do have places I return to – surprisingly, perhaps, they may not have the most amazing food, but they are very Parisian. So Le Dome (14e) is nice and very French. Fogon (6e) serves the most fantastic Spanish food – the paella... Some Asian places – I like the Enjoy sushi bar (17e) for the family atmosphere and there’s a Korean place in the Trocadero too. Great Italian food at Casa Bini (6e) also.

#### **An enthusiastic cook comes to Paris. Where would you advise they go for their produce?**

Start with the market – Marche Iena, for example, on avenue du President Wilson (16e). Choose your vegetables here, you’ll find produce from Paris’ most famous gardener, Joel Thiebault. Amazing quality! For wine, Caves Taillevent or Caves Auge are both extremely good (both 8e). Meat? I would pick Boucherie Hugo Desnoye (14e) – extraordinary. Fish? Poissonerie du Dome (14e) is the best in Paris, it is absolute quality and absolute freshness. Bread from Poilane (3e) and cheese from Fromage Rouge (14e), which is the very best place for cheese in Paris. Or I’d suggest Marie-Anne Cantin (7e) or Alleosse (17e), which is in the rue Poncelet market that I enjoy very much. I would also suggest your cook goes to Bon Marche (7e) – you can find all the produce you want there.

#### **If we gave you one place, one taste, one dish, one experience to sum up what Paris means to you in terms of food, what would it be?**

Well, of course I do not know everything! What to choose? I think something as simple and as Parisian as this: a plate of oysters! No, a large assiette de fruits de mer! That’s Paris for me...

example). Prices are very reasonable compared to hotels, many are well-equipped and all of them give you that unmissable feeling – if only for a week – of being a Parisian. They're easy to find on the internet and many of the firms or landlords speak English.

The only tricky moment is ensuring you can properly schedule key collection – my last apartment saw me and the landlord both arriving early, but the one before had me worried in the street for the best part of an hour before I thought to ask in the local café and discovered the landlord at the bar, oblivious to time.

Pick an apartment near a market and holiday heaven is within your grasp. Sightseeing in the morning, lunch in a restaurant, afternoon food shopping and evening cooking – what more do you want out of a holiday? There are markets all over Paris, of course, but these are the best: the the rues de l'Annonciation, Daguerre, Lepic, des Martyrs, Lévis, Montorgueil, Mouffetard and Poncelet, for example.

Although you will be delighted at the range in most supermarkets, you'll also certainly want to check out the high end: Fauchon (26 place de la Madeleine, 8e) is completely over the top but wonderful, Lafayette Gourmet (40 boulevard Haussmann, 9e) is an essential stop and Lenotre (16 boulevard de Courcelles, 8e) is an inspiration.

There are too many specialist food shops to mention, but stick with the French style and shop with precision at the experts: fromageries for cheese, patisseries for cakes and so on. And if you want to cheat, don't forget the traiteurs for ready-prepared treats.

And where better than Paris, home of Cordon Bleu, for some cookery lessons? Inspired by Meryl Streep's latest film, *Julia and Julie*, you can take private or group lessons, one-offs or short courses all over Paris, often combining cooking with wine courses.

Again, too many to list but search at [www.parisinfo.com](http://www.parisinfo.com) for 'gastronomy courses'.

Nothing beats an insider's view of the city. A number of companies now offer guided gourmet visits and tours, though to my taste they're a bit pricey – try [www.succulent-paris.com](http://www.succulent-paris.com) or [www.q-rius.com](http://www.q-rius.com) for a start. More interesting, perhaps, is the Paris Greeter service ([www.parisgreeter.org](http://www.parisgreeter.org)) which puts you in touch with volunteers who'll show you around the Parisian's city. In French or English, you can specify interests and a trip round some of the food markets could be a great way to orientate yourself to shopping, French-style.

Finally, as a capital city for food lovers, there's nearly always a special event happening somewhere – the start of October has an annual wine fair, with massive bargains city-wide, for example. On my most recent trip, a group of 20 farmers and manufacturers from the South-West set up stands in the road outside my hotel, offering tastings of cheese, breads, saucissons and wine from 9am to 9pm. Nothing starts a day off like a dozen oysters a glass of white wine before a morning of culture in a museum!

I hope my whistlestop tour of Paris has given you some ideas. It's a city that both constantly changes and stays the same – every visit for me sees a reconnection with old favourites like the tiny market on steep rue Mouffetard (5e) and every visit brings fresh discoveries like the dilapidated wine bar Le Baron Rouge (1 rue Theophile Roussel, 12e), with 100 great glasses on offer whilst Parisians fill large plastic containers from giant barrels of cheap red wine.

A city of contrasts, Paris is also a city where you'll never go hungry. Most of all, it's a city where the connection to great food is a constant inspiration.

