

Leah Travels France

By Leah Walker



Each month, our Editor-at-Large and Paris resident, Leah Walker, is opening her French address book. She'll share the latest, greatest, little known, classic and up-and-coming finds focused on her adopted home country.

Take This Tour

World War II buffs and those simply interested in the history of Paris will appreciate "Lights Out, Paris Under the Occupation" by Context Travel. Led by a modern historian, this walking tour examines the lives of Parisians under Nazi Germany's rule. Focused on the Right Bank of the city, the tour explores a Jewish residential neighborhood in the 9th arrondissement, Place Vendôme, Place de la Concorde, and other lesser-known sites along the way. During the three-hour tour, stories from Jewish citizens and members of the WWII Résistance are recounted, while the roles of notable people such as Josephine Baker, Coco Chanel and Ernest Hemingway are explored. This tour sheds a new light on familiar sites, bringing history to life; and is easily one of my favorite experiences in Paris.

Fine Dining

Obviously, Paris doesn't have the monopoly on Michelin-starred restaurants in France, but it might come as a surprise that the picturesque Alpine town of Megève is home to three chefs who've earned the coveted stars. Located in the Rothschild-owned property, Chalet du Mont d'Arbois, Le 1920 is under the direction of young Chef Julien Gatillon. With one Michelin star, Le 1920 is a contemporary take on traditional French gastronomy. At the one-star La Table de l'Alpaga, Chef Christophe Schuffenecker has created a 'refined mountain cuisine' as

beautiful as Mont Blanc, which can be seen from the warm and elegant dining room. At the three-star restaurant, Flocons de Sel, Chef Emmanuel Renaut has created the ultimate in French Alpine gastronomy. In the event there's not a reservation to be had, try Le Flocon Village, his casual bistro in the center of town, which is also a delicious option. Megève in Rhône-Alpes

For the Wine Lover

In Paris's fifth arrondissement is De Vinis Illvstribvs. Lionel Michelin and his wife, Dominique, opened this extraordinary wine shop in 1994. Specializing in rare and aged wines, De Vinis Illvstribvs is the go-to place in Paris for those looking for a very special bottle. Lionel's expertise is unparalleled, and his and knowledge of French wines is astounding. The store also has a good selection of newer wine from various French regions. Personally selected by Lionel, a bottle can be had starting around 20 euros. Custom-made tastings are available in the cave. Surrounded by vintage wines in the cave, tastings with cheese, lunch, or dinner can be arranged. No matter your budget or knowledge of wine, De Vinis Illvstribvs can organize a personalized experience and find a bottle to please your palate. De Vinis Illvstribvs, 48, rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève, Paris

Visit This Museum

Located in Paris's eighth arrondissement, the serene Musée Jacquemart-André is often overlooked by tourists. Possibly the finest of the city's small museums, it's a magnificent find for lovers of Italian Renaissance art and 18th century French painters. This magnificent mansion was built in 1875 for Edouard Andre. Here, he and his wife, Nélie,

amassed a huge art collection. Nélie bequeathed the home and its contents to the Institut de France, which was opened to the public in 1913. The home is filled with Louis XV and Louis XVI-era furniture, tapestries and objets d'art, which is a testament to the couple's travels across Europe and Asia. Whether for a light lunch, tea, or Sunday brunch, make it a point to enjoy Café Jacquemart-André, which is located in the mansion's former dining room. Visitors with Android or iPhones can download the museum's free app, which includes a guided tour, interactive maps, biographies, and images. Musée Jacquemart-André, 158 Boulevard Haussmann, 75008 Paris

Take This Walk

In my travels around France, I've come to appreciate the places that have a well-organized plan for international visitors; whether it's bilingual historical markers (Paris doesn't!) or an official walking tour, like the Owl's Trail in Dijon. Similar to the Freedom Trail in Boston, Dijon's version covers much of the city center, and includes three optional loops. Bronze owls embedded in the sidewalks mark the route, but to get the most of the 22-stage trail, a guide can be purchased at the office of tourism. The walk takes about an hour, and covers the best of this historically dense city. One of the best things about taking the self-guided Owl's Trail is that you're on your own schedule. Be sure to visit the museums, churches, and parks along the way; as well as some relaxing time on one of the many terraces in Place de la Liberation. Dijon in Burgundy.

Sip on This

Surprisingly, only two percent of all Cognac produced actually stays in France, with the largest markets being the USA, China, and Russia. Despite the lower demand by the French, the grape spirit is strongly protected by appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC). Like Champagne, in order to be called 'Cognac' the brandy must be produced in the Cognac region. Not just an after-dinner drink, Cognac is delicious as an aperitif (freeze a VSOP and serve in a Champagne flute) paired with meals and mixed in a cocktail.

The Cognac Summit was created in 2008 at the request of the Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac (BNIC) by 20 renowned bartenders. Made with not-so-sweet lemonade, it's perfect on a warm day.

1 piece lime peel
½ inch piece peeled ginger root,
cut crosswise into quarter-size
slices
1½ ounces Cognac
ice cubes
2 ounces of lemonade
1 long piece cucumber peel
for garnish

Special Souvenir

French perfume is legendary. Scents from design houses like Chanel and Dior are classics. However, if you're looking to come home from France with something truly unique, make an appointment at Le Studio des Parfums in Paris's Marais to create your own custom-made scent. Expert perfumer and nose, Sophie, will help determine your perfume personality





and preferences with a series of questions. From there, your nose is the guide. The result is a one-of-a-kind fragrance that you've picked, mixed and named. The recipe is kept on file, ready to reorder. Le Studio des Parfums, 23, rue du Bourg Tibourg, Paris

Chat with a Concierge

I sat down with Tony Le Goff, the Chief Concierge at Shangri-La, Paris, for insight on some of his favorite things from the City of Light.

Leah Walker: What restaurant would you choose for a special dinner?

Tony Le Goff: I was in my favorite restaurant just the other day – Septime in the 11th arrondissement. It's not a very sexy area, so Bobo and creative. It's impossible to get a reservation, and if you cancel, you can guarantee you'll never get another. It's one-star Michelin and the cuisine is wonderful. To me, this type of restaurant is the future. It's simple products that come together to create magic. The staff is good looking, efficient and friendly. It has a bit of a New York feeling. Septime, 80 Rue de Charonne, 75011 Paris

LW: What is an ideal Saturday in Paris for you?

TLG: Since I live on the Right Bank, I like to go to the Left Bank. It's a different world. In the morning, the vendors and antique sellers at Carré

Rive Gauche are more open and friendly. In the afternoon, they become Parisian. If it's early morning, which is difficult, I like to have a coffee at a super-cliché place like Les Deux Magots. There's no one at this time. The tourists haven't arrived and people are friendly. You speak French and read the local paper on a wooden stick. It's just a coffee, which costs a fortune. The people are cleaning the streets and opening the stores. This time in the morning is perfect to me. Les Deux Magots, 6 Place Saint-Germain des Prés, 75006 Paris

LW: What classic Parisian experience never goes out of style, even for Parisians?

TLG: It's for children, but the boats in the Luxembourg Garden have existed for decades. I was not born in Paris, so I missed out on it, but this is something that is very Parisian. It's a tradition that's been passed down from generation to generation. One of our guests recently requested that a boat be purchased for his granddaughter, because it was a fond memory from his youth. Other traditions in the Luxembourg Gardens for children are the balançoire (swings) and Théâtre des Marionnettes. These are affordable, and the gardens are magnificent. It's something that remains from the past and builds the personality of a Parisian.

LW: What is your favorite café in



the city?

TLG: As I told you, Les Deux Magots in the early morning, but in the afternoon, it's Café de l'Époque near the Louvre. It's near Galerie Véro-Dodat, with the original Louboutin store on one end and the cafe at the other. Of course, you know the national sport is watching people. So, you watch people and drink Rosé. There's the Ministry of Culture that is just across. There is a mix of tourists and Parisians passing by. It's simple – go there by coincidence or on purpose. It has kept a charm from the 1950s. The waiters are sometimes friendly. My favorite drink is a spritz, and they do it quite well there. Café de l'Époque, 2, Rue du Bouloi, 75001 Paris

LW: What's trendy in Paris now?

TLG: Geographically, the eastern part of the city. It's like New York. Things have moved east of the center. It's no wonder that restaurants like Septime are opening there, rather than in a noble area.

In terms of contemporary creation, what Palais de Tokyo is doing is amazing. Not only in terms of exhibitions, but what they're doing beyond. They other day, they turned the empty fountain into a basketball court. They attract people that might not ever come to a museum. It's very young and creative. They do fashion shows, and are really on the cutting edge. Palais de Tokyo is a real example of what culture should be in attracting all kinds of people, regardless of social level. It's not a question of money.

In the evenings, there are barges on the banks of the river. My favorite one is Rosa Bonheur sur Seine. It's between the Alexander III and Concorde bridges. There are lines to get on the barge, but once you're on, there's a very large bar and lots of great people and music – a bit Bobo. It opens in the morning and closes at 2:00 AM. Rosa Bonheur sur Seine, Quai d'Orsay, Port des Invalides, 75007 Paris