

It's interesting how quickly we acclimate to new surroundings. What was once foreign soon becomes our new normal. With the apartment window open, I could hear the rise and fall of my building's small, green dumpsters. Chimes from the nearby clock tower rang out from dawn to dusk with precision timing. On Sunday mornings, the silence was deafening. These sounds, along with the buzz of Vespas and squeaking of metro brakes, became the soundtrack of my September in Paris. It was a spectacular song that rivaled any by Serge Gainsbourg.

"I guess it goes to show that you just never know where life will take you. You search for answers. You wonder what it all means. You stumble, and you soar. And, if you're lucky, you make it to Paris for a while." – Amy Thomas

I was a little late to the Paris party, but coveted living in the city ever since I first visited in 2012. I've returned to the French capital numerous times since that first trip, and each time I found myself more enamored than I ever believed possible. I traveled to the City of Light six times in 2014, and with each solemn taxi ride to Charles de Gaulle, I felt gutted. In July, I decided that my next trip needed to be an extended one. A few days or even a week wouldn't do. I doubted a month would be sufficient, but it was a start.

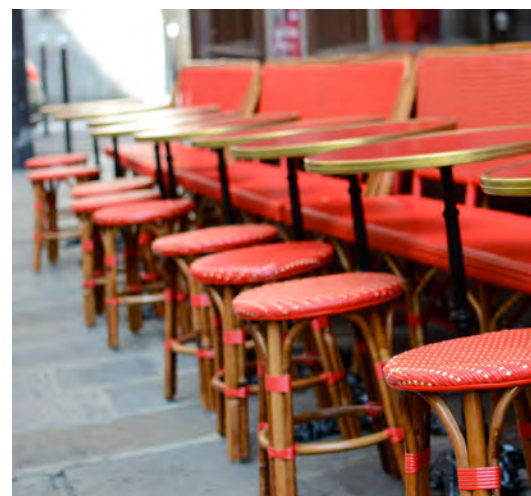
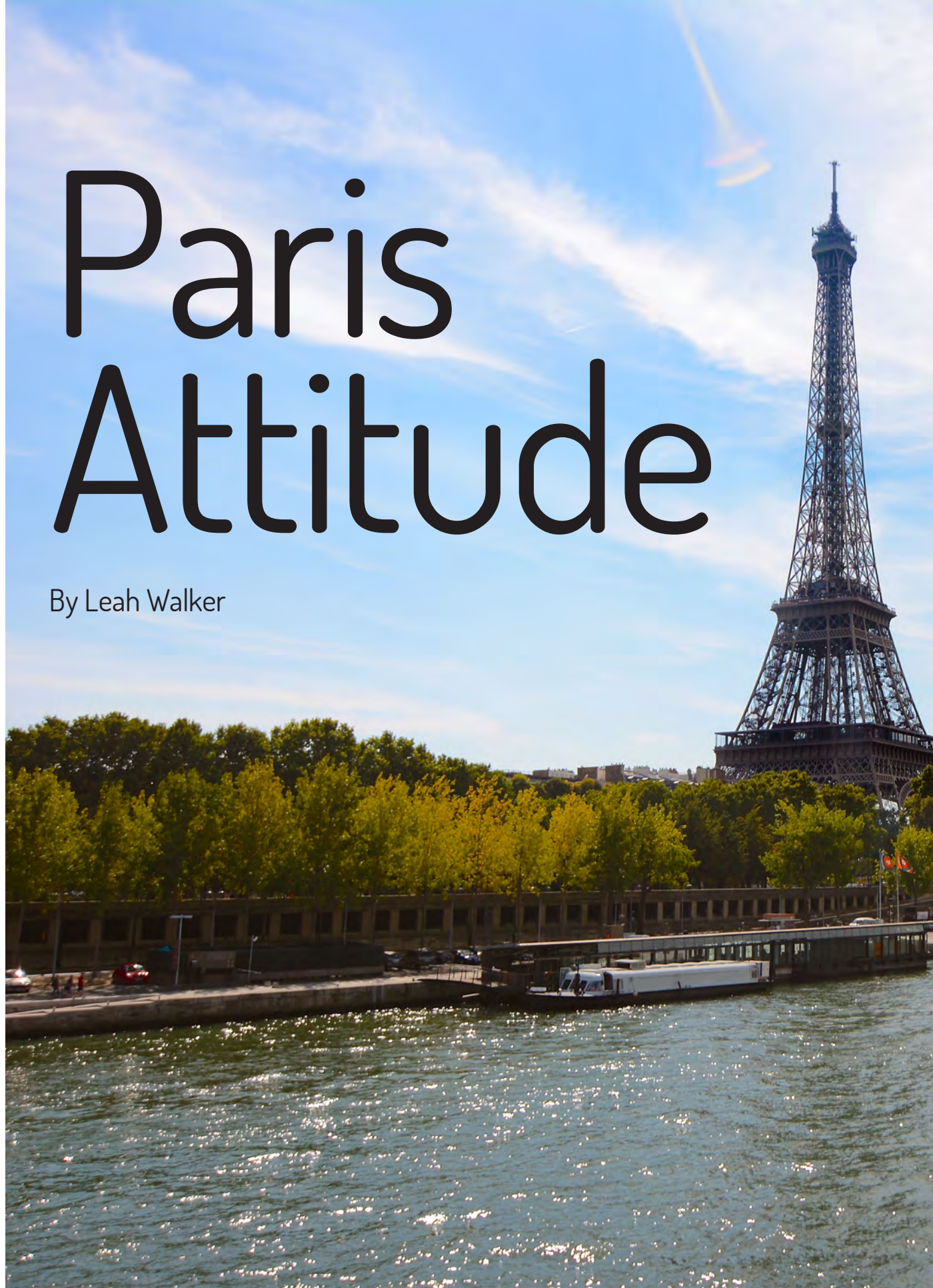
My previous experiences in Paris were for work, which included sleeping in super-luxurious, five-star hotels, and decadent dining in internationally acclaimed restaurants. Luggage rarely touched my hands and black cars with dark tinted windows chauffeured me to my next destination. I suppose it's technically my reality since I'm actually experiencing it. However, that is not my real life, nor is it for most Parisians.

I've proclaimed Paris to be my favorite city in the world, but had I put the city on a pedestal simply because of the royal treatment I'd previously received? I felt like a month in an apartment would give me a small taste of what it's like to live in the world's #1 tourist destination. Although it's not nearly as glamorous as a luxury hotel, I crazily yearned for this sort of experience.

For my September to remember, I looked to Paris Attitude, an apartment rental company specializing in the City of Light. I wanted to experience Paris as

Paris Attitude

By Leah Walker





a local, rather than the pampered guest of a palace hotel. There would be no concierge to help me find a market, nor would there be maid service to bring fresh towels. No, I would have to figure out the washing machine instructions in French, and where to buy limes, (which surprisingly isn't as simple as it sounds) all on my lonesome. Absent would be the driver; instead, I'd navigate the metro, or walk.

I'd stayed in Parisian apartments on two previous occasions, but those were shorter trips—two to five nights. This was the first time I could completely unpack my bags. Clothes were hung; shoes found their temporary home; and toiletries were laid out in the bathroom cabinet. For someone who's on the road most of the time, this was a strange feeling; one in which I relished.

Not only could I fill my closet, but also a refrigerator and pantry. One of the benefits of an apartment, after all, is the ability to cook and chill wine sans ice bucket. Oddly enough, I'd missed trips to the grocery store in the sort of way that big-city transplants miss driving. What seems like a mundane chore and necessary evil to some is most often appreciated only after absent from one's life. Not that buying milk felt as liberating as a spur-of-the-moment train to Amsterdam, but knowing that I would be in a place long enough to finish the quart of milk was.





A little area of Paris' 9th arrondissement became my home, if only for a little while. I had a key—an actual key—rather than a plastic, computer-coded card. I had a regular sandwich place where I was recognized. The grocery store clerks knew me well enough to know that merci and au revoir were essentially the only words I could utter in

French. Not being able to properly communicate was a humbling experience, but in my case, familiarity bred compassion rather than contempt.

Life is not all rosy in Paris, just like every other place in the world. It's not like there is some cocoon that envelops this gorgeous city and

protects the people in it from heartbreak or hunger. One look at those in the metro station and that image is abolished. A smile is often taken for flirtation and actual communication amongst strangers is a rarity. It's frustrating, especially for someone who grew up south of the Mason-Dixon Line, where grins and pleasantries are exchanged even

between mortal enemies. For a non-Parisian, living in the city is like playing checkers, without being given a set of rules. From afar, the game seems simple and even enjoyable, but taking a seat at the table is another story. Customs and communication are foreign and easily misunderstood. Navigating the red





and black board can be maddening, filled with wrong moves and missteps. It's a strategic game, one that requires intensive observation and study in order to become successful.

Despite all the complexities, that September made me love Paris more than I could ever imagine. In fact, it was half way through the month that I decided to apply for a Compétences et Talents Card, which is a three-year renewable visa allowing me to live and work in France. There were miles of paperwork and multiple hoops to jump through, but in February 2015, France deemed that I had skills and talents that would benefit the country. Thus, I was awarded the coveted visa and quickly began planning my Gallic escape.

"I know so much is going to happen here, but I just don't know how. It feels like Paris is full of so many adventures just waiting to be had."—Rachel Kapelke-Dale
In order to live in Paris, one must

have a home in Paris, and finding my slice of paradise all the way from Texas wasn't an experience I welcomed. Rather than navigate the city's real estate labyrinth on my own, I again turned to Paris Attitude. What I found was a cozy (small) studio in the 8th arrondissement, just steps from one of my favorite green spaces in Paris: Parc Monceau. This district is also home to the Champs-Élysées, Grand Palais, Église de la Madeleine. Of course, this isn't my forever home, but right now, I'm happy to have a place to unpack, fill the fridge, and call my own.

I know that living in Paris isn't some sort of fairytale where Bordeaux wine flows from the faucet and accordions provide the perfect Parisian ambiance for a stroll in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It's a diverse city of millions, all moving in different directions. In Paris, anything can happen on any given day, at least that's my belief.

A wrong turn or missed metro can reveal a side to this enchanting city that I never knew existed. I'm nervously anticipating life in my new hometown. But to survive and flourish, I'll need courage, a thick skin, confidence and a little bit of Paris Attitude.

Fellow Francophiles, stay tuned for Leah's new monthly feature dedicated to all-things France. She will unearth the latest, greatest, little known, classic, and up-and-coming content focused on gastronomy, hotels, bars, spas, shopping, design, wine and spirits, spas, sport, tours, galleries and culture.

