

By Judy Colbert. Judy@JudyColbert.com

Will you be traveling to Paris for the IFAHR meeting and the races at Longchamp? Or perhaps you are only dreaming of the trip. Regardless, Paris, the City of Lights, is truly one place that stays the same while ever-evolving. Whether it's your first trip or your fiftieth, there is always something to learn and something new to see.

With some 25,000,000 visitors a year, Paris is the most visited city in the most visited country in the world. Therefore, you need a few tips to make this visit just a little more interesting or different and, perhaps, bring you up-to-date.

Notes You May Not Know:

If you'll be visiting any of the 60+ top museums and monuments, buy a Paris Museum Pass (<http://en.parismuseumpass.com/>). The price is 42€ for two days, 56€ for four days or 69€ for six days.

More than the money it might save, the pass lets you skip the regular ticket line in most places by going to the Paris Museum Pass line. Equally important, you can re-enter on the same pass. Go to a museum in the morning, leave for déjeuner (lunch), then return for a few afternoon hours. The Paris Museum Pass does not let you skip the security line if there is one. (One thing to note, the Paris-Pass is a different operation sold by a private company, which includes more options and costs more.)

Many automated ticket machines only work with Visa or MasterCard that have the embedded microchips (chip and pin). Most American cards do not have them yet.

Pickpockets and string men (trying to tie string bracelets around your wrist) are becoming a more serious problem. Limit

what you carry, secure your bag or backpack (wear it backwards), and leave a copy of your identity papers in your hotel room. Just say no to the string men.

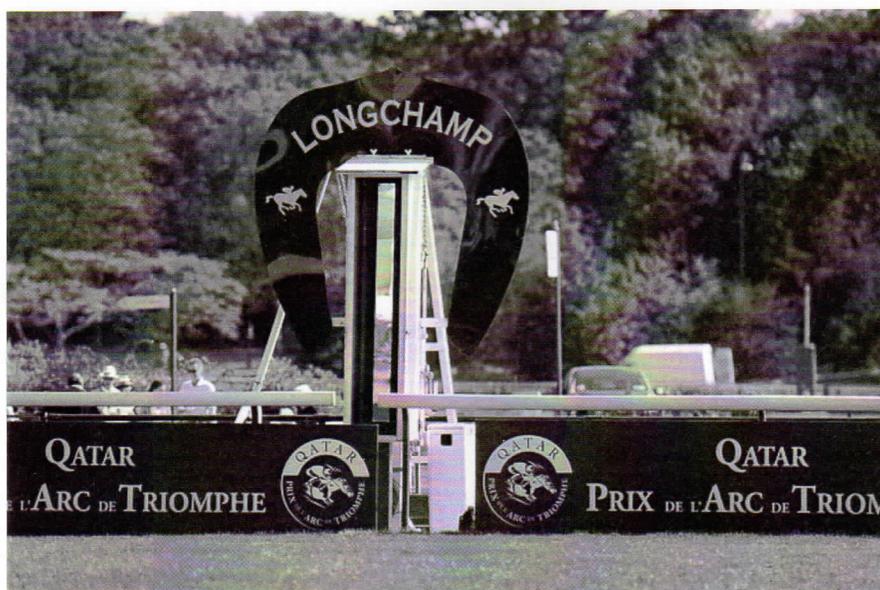
Please do not try to place a love lock on Ponts des Arts or any other bridge. It may be romantic, but the locks and keys tossed into the Seine are causing severe problems.

If you're checking Yelp or TripAdvisor for recommendations and comments and see only positive things, particularly about restaurants, it could be because hundreds of chefs have signed a petition to ban negative reviews.

Attractions:

Musée du Louvre (closed Tuesday) has eight million visitors annually. Even considering it's open 310 days, that's about 26,000 a day. It's crowded and the pyramid entrance is the first place you see the crowds. That's when you enter through the Lions Gates (Port de Lions) on the southwest side of the Louvre (Denon Wing) or the Metro subway station entrance. The Lions Gate may be closed on a Friday, higher security alerts, or whenever there's a staffing shortage, but you're at the shortest route to the Italian Renaissance paintings. Guided tours are available in several languages. There are 15 places to eat from carry-out to seated dining (including Starbucks), indoors and outdoors. (<http://www.louvre.fr/en>)

The Centre Pompidou (closed Tuesday), has the largest collection of modern art in Europe and also has a somewhat unknown entrance. The red elevator to the left of the main entrance is reserved for the Georges Restaurant, well worth it if only for the panoramic view. The public library (Bibliothèque Publique d'Information or BPI) has its own entrance on the Rue de Renard and its own entrance/exit to the main lobby, but it is not always a shorter line.



Tour Eiffel has had its 125 anniversary (May 6, 1889, built and opened for the Universal Exposition in Paris) this year. The Eiffel Tower also has its secrets, available through a 90-minute guided behind-the-scenes tour (\$29.84). Visit the military bunker (under the Champs de Mars) and the engine room, see how the elevators are controlled, and ascend to the Le Jules Verne restaurant for VIP views of Paris. Alas, this doesn't give you front-of-the-line access to the elevator, so allow about 30 minutes extra for that wait, nor does it guarantee a seat in the restaurant. Designate whether you want to be in a French or English tour. A ticket to the third floor is available from a kiosk on the second floor. No high-heeled shoes. <http://eiffel-tower.us/index.html> (main Eiffel Tower Web site); <http://www.cultural.fr/en/visites/behind-the-scenes-of-the-eiffel-tower-369> (a behind-the-scenes tour company).



A real "Pet Cemetary", Le Cimetière des Chiens et Autres Animaux Domestiques

Reaching Sacré-Coeur can make even the heartiest and best-fit a little weary. Either take the Montmartrobus (a circular route from Place Pigalle) or the Funicular Montmartre (from Place Suzanne-Valadon to the Place Willette below SacréCoeur). Each is one Metro ticket. Visit the basilica, and eat a baguette with cheese on the steps overlooking the city. Climb a steep spiral staircase of about 300 steps to the base of the dome and enjoy the second-highest viewpoint (after the Eiffel Tower) in the city. Then meander down the hill, exploring the little shops and side streets. This way, whatever you buy will only have to be carried down, not up and down. <http://www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/english>.

Le Cimetière des Chiens et Autres Animaux Domestiques is the cemetery for dogs and other domestic animals (closed Monday). You know the French love their pets, particularly dogs. So, you should not be surprised that they are enthusiastic about where their pets go when they die, including horses, cats, birds, monkeys, and even lions. They reached

40,000 in 1958. There are tributes to service animals, Mardi-Gras decorations, sculptures, and a much airier feel than at the famed Pere Lachaise cemetery where Jean de La Fontaine, Molière, Jim Morrison, Edith Piaf, Oscar Wilde, Honoré de Balzac, Chopin, and Max Ernst are buried. At the dog cemetery, you'll find lots of living dogs that must

be on a short leash and cats that sun themselves upon the gravestones. Alas, the lack of allure of the cemetery has brought discussions of closing it. The entrance fee is 3,5€ and that includes a cemetery map designating some of the more notable and interesting residents. If the massive front gate is locked, go to your right a little, look for a smaller gate and a guardhouse. In Asnières-sur-Seine. <http://www.asnieres-sur-seine.fr/Tourisme-international/Patrimoine/Le-cimetiere-des-animaux>.

Disneyland Paris is Disney for the most part except there's a lot of people speaking French and it's a Mount Everest thing—you can say you've been there. As the weather turns cooler, you've find the crowds are almost non-existent, some restaurants will be closed, and operating hours may be reduced. It does have one thing you won't find at Florida's Disney World or California's Disneyland. Inside the Art-Deco inspired (in tribute to Paris's grand department stores) shopping area they have items that have had a slight French design touch. They also sell items that are suitable for cold weather. You can find character-themed jackets, sweatshirts, hats, pajamas, and you get the idea - not available in sunnier U.S. climates. <http://us.disneylandparis.com/index.xhtmll>.

Shopping:

To combine culture and shopping, stop by the new Printemps du Louvre in front of I.M. Pei's inverted pyramid at the underground entrance to the museum. At 20,000 square feet, it's a mini version of the famed department store with leather goods, accessories, beauty area, jewelry

and watches set amid the glittery décor of chrome, marble, ceilings, and carpets. Revolving art shows are displayed in the central area. (<http://departmentstoreparis.printemps.com/store/louvre>).

Choosing between Printemps and Galeries Lafayette is a flip of a coin or which side of Avenue Haussmann you're on. If you're undecided, Printemps just completed a five-year, \$100 million facelift in 2012 that included a renovation of the original mosaics, zinc domes, and extensive gold leaf adornments. The cafe has its décor on a rotating basis by Vogue Paris, Alain Ducasse, and Baccarat. (<http://departmentstoreparis.printemps.com>). Favorite souvenirs involve a taste of France. Remember, some items can't be taken home (e.g., soft or runny cheeses, meat), so check the U.S. Customs list (https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/82/~travelers-bringing-food-into-the-u.s.-for-personal-use) or make sure you consume everything before you leave France.

Stop by a large grocery store or market for most of these items. On the top of the food list (better than a miniature metal Eiffel Tower?) are Bonne Maman Madeleines in 24- and 36-count packages. The little scalloped cookies are nice and buttery.

Macarons are another favorite cookie. These dried meringue cookies, stuffed to creamy overflowingness, come in variety packs so you don't have to choose which flavor you like best. You can watch them being made in a neighborhood patisserie or even take a class to learn how to make them yourself.

You don't need a blow torch or a three-hour meal to have crème brûlée. The custards come in little glass pots with a package of caramel bits that you sprinkle on top and watch as they become a hard brûlée crust.

Stop by a fromagerie for your favorite or to taste a new-to-you cheese. Tell the clerk how you're going to use the cheese (with fruit, wine, in a dish) and when (immediately, at home) so you can buy a piece of cheese that's either ripe and ready when you buy it or needs a week or two before it reaches perfection. Ask to have the cheeses packaged individually sous vide (in vacuum-sealed plastic) so you can pack them in your suitcase.

Just as jams and jellies are packaged in individual serving sizes, you should see individual packages of Nutella (the chocolate hazelnut spread that's good on bread, ice cream, a spoon or finger), on your petit déjeuner (breakfast) table. Bad weather this past spring in Turkey (the major grower of hazelnuts) resulted in predictions of dire Nutella shortages. You can buy the packages online, but they seem to taste

better on a piece of French bread.

Outlet shopping is another American practice that has reached foreign shores. La Vallée Village offers a wide selection of stores. Check for shopping services and tax-free buying. Le Vallé Village (near Disneyland Paris) has 110 stores including Celine, Armani, Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Christian Lacroix, Caroline Herrera, and Givenchy. <http://www.lavalleeivillage.com/>

You don't want your little friends and family members complaining about the "My parents went to Paris and all I got ..." t-shirt, so head for Villae Joue Club, an amazing 22,000 square foot toy store treasure chest of things cuddly, electronic, wooden, mechanical, French-made, and other joys (<http://villageparis.joueclubdrive.fr>). For those who are consumed by prestidigitation and illusions, stop by Mayette Magic (<http://www.mayette.com>).

Activities:

Paris is fortunate enough to have twenty branches of the Parisien d'un jour (Global Greeters) organization. One provides tours of Paris (<http://www.greeters.paris/>), another for Boulogne-Billancourt (http://www.boulognegreeters.fr/index_a.html). Greeters are volunteers who will take up to six people on a specialized tour of about two hours, at your pace. For free! Guides are available in several languages. You may tour a little-known area or have lunch at a local's home. A new chapter features residents of the Paris suburb or Boulogne-Billancourt who are eager to meet foreign guests. The tour guide may talk to you about the neighborhood where she/he lives, its past, its architecture (buildings designed by Le Corbusier, Mallet Stevens, Auguste Perret, Fisher and contemporary architects), six-century-old gardens, history, gastronomy, fashion, markets, cafés, artisans or artists, or places of interest to children. You may hear about personal experiences and anecdotes and see favorite places. Although the tour is free, donations (via PayPal) to the organization are accepted and appreciated.

Greeters are available in Loix, Lyon City, Marseille, Meurtha et Moselle, Mulhouse, Nancy, Nantes, Nice, Nord, Pas de Calais, Pont du Gard, Rennes, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Selestat, Tam-Albi, Toulouse, Tours, Troyes, Vallée de Munster, and Versailles.

Reservations must be made before (preferably two weeks prior) to your arrival and not for your day of arrival or departure.

So there you have it. In between races and meetings get out there and try something new in Paris. Or...start making plans for next year!