



Cool off in the Trocadero fountains in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower. — REUTERS FILES

Breathe life in Paris

FRANCAIS: Lose yourself in the beautiful City of Light

BY SANDRA O'CONNELL
FOR THE PROVINCE

Whether you're going to celebrate Canada Day with a French twist or just want to hide in a crowd, Paris is the place to be.

You can both lose yourself and discover a new you in the intoxicating energy of the City of Light.

Paris itself breathes life, exhaling its soul right into inhabitants. I swear this is true. You only have to visit the city once to be infected for life.

My short visit started in Saint Germain in the 6th arrondissement as the sun set behind the centuries old chimney stacks.

Gliding through the maze of streets full of art galleries teeming with cocktail parties, I pined to be part of the camaraderie. At the next lit gallery I passed, I held my head high and sauntered through the door, drinking in the sophistication and art like they were a fine Bordeaux red.

With the lingering buzz of Francois in my ears, I moved on to L'Hotel, an idyllic hideaway nestled on a quiet street, to imbibe in a cocktail where Oscar Wilde last laid his head. The seductive concoctions in the dark and plush room paired with Wilde's creative spirit filled my notebook.

Wake up at the crack of dawn at least one morning of your visit. There is nothing quite like wandering the empty streets of Paris as the sun cracks the horizon. Finish your stroll with a croissant and café crème at Café le Buci, an ideal location to watch the very fashionable world go by.

High on caffeine, I hopped on the Metro to Père Lachaise Cemetery, the most visited cemetery in the world, to walk among the peaceful raised tombs nestled under leafy trees. Skip the overpopulated grave of Jim Morrison and set your sights on Edith Piaf's bed instead.

Le Marais was next on my list, a neighbourhood where roaming for vintage and consigned treasures is sport. The gems that may be found in hidden boutiques are worth their weight in gold. While it's entirely possible to spend hours getting lost in Le Marais, I was on a tight timeline. Hopping on the Metro again, I traversed to Montmartre.

I trekked to Sacré-Cœur Basilica to revel in the marvellous structure and truly breathtaking views of Paris. The gargoyles and narrow, winding passageways will leave you dizzy with history. With a growling stomach after my climb, I settled in for a late lunch at Un Zebra Café and



Visit Paris once and you'll become infatuated with its vitality, history and beauty for life. — VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST FILES

Paris Tips and Tricks

■ As a visitor to a city you naturally want to see the tourist spots, but be sure to allocate a good chunk of time to fit in with the locals. Absorb another culture by following in the inhabitants' footsteps.

■ Everyone in Paris wears scarves. Source your own chic accessory at a consignment or vintage store. Psst... they make excellent gifts.

■ Be prepared to gain 10 pounds as soon as your well soled feet hit the cobblestones; but not to worry, a favourite pastime of locals in Paris is running along the Seine. Besides being an excellent way to see the sights, you can also run off the profiteroles you've been ingesting.

STAY
L'Hotel — 16 rue des Beaux-Arts, 75006

EAT
Café le Buci — 52 rue Dauphine, 75006
Pâtisserie Stohrer — 51 rue Montorgueil, 75002

Le Fumoir — 6 Rue de l'Amiral de Coligny, 75001
La Palette — 43 rue de Seine, 75006

DRINK
Hotel Costes — 239 rue Saint-Honoré, 75001

Le Bar, Shangri-La Hotel — 10 avenue d'Iéna, 75116
Le Baron — 6 avenue Marceau, 75008

DO
Père Lachaise Cemetery — M Père Lachaise
Sacré-Cœur Basilica — M Abbesses
Notre Dame — M St-Michel
Pacha Hammam — 17 rue Mayet, 75006

a delicious Croque Monsieur. It was here that I discovered the French friendliness that people say is non-existent. The two men I became acquainted with were happy to spill their secrets on the best of Paris and even invited me to a soirée. Tres bien!

That evening, I had a date. Yes, it is important to have friends and lovers in cities all around the world. He took me to Le Fumoir, where my palate was teased and satiated with the best of French cuisine. A night cap at the seductive Hotel Costes and a romantic stroll over the Pont des Arts were the icing on the éclair.

To prepare for my final day in Paris, I treated myself to a flaky and sweet pastry from the oldest patisserie in Paris, Pâtisserie Stohrer, where the first croissant is reputed to have been made. My pastry came with me to the resplendent Notre Dame, where I gawked at the precision

and craftsmanship which never cease to amaze me.

Opting for a lazy afternoon doing as the locals do, I chose to lounge at a spa, but not just any spa — Paris is known for its traditional hammams, and I couldn't leave the city without experiencing one myself. I spent my afternoon at the Hammam Pacha indulging in steaming, massaging and soaking until my skin was as soft as a rose petal.

For dinner I feasted on tartare de boeuf on the bustling terrace of La Palette before venturing to my Parisian party. My night came to a spectacular end sipping on Pink Ladies in the lascivious and regal Le Bar at the new Shangri-La Hotel before giving my heels a spin on the dance floor at the notorious Le Baron.

As I left the city the next morning, I felt Paris stirring inside me, La Vie en Rose is now tattooed on my heart.

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