



# THREE PERFECT DAYS IN PARIS

BY MICHELLE LYN

*How to eat, drink and shop your way through the City of Light.*

**O**NE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS TO do in Paris is nothing. Nothing in Paris, however, is actually quite something really. Strolling the streets in quiet observation, people watching, sitting on the banks of the Seine, sipping a glass of wine—it is these simple things that I love most about Paris. The French have a name for someone who does this, a *flâneur*, and it is this wandering and strolling that truly provides a rich, urban experience that offers a genuine understanding of a city's true landscape.

I've probably been to Paris 20 times, but a recent visit was easily the best trip I've ever had. It could be because I've been so many times that I didn't need to do the requisite tourist stops, or perhaps it was because I simply allowed myself to spend three full days being a *flâneur*, with no expectations.

On this particular trip, I only had three days to spare, so I had to maximize my schedule to make it worth my while. What I had to decide was what class of service to book. An overnight flight via United Airlines would save me a day of travel, but I knew I wanted to be functional when I arrived. Otherwise, what's the point? Therein was my answer. BusinessFirst was the way to go, so I could be pampered and well-rested after sleeping in a flat-bed through the night.

Some girlfriends had rented an apartment through A la Carte Paris, who sent a driver to greet me upon arrival. The train will get you into Paris cheaply, but if you want

convenience and time is of the essence, always hop in a car.

A la Carte Paris has a stunning portfolio of designer apartments in desirable parts of the city. You'll feel like a true Parisian, buying fresh baguettes and schlepping groceries up tiny, crooked stairwells. Some apartments even have views of the Eiffel Tower, which lets you avoid the throngs of tourists and enjoy its beauty from your own balcony.

On my first morning, we headed out to Montmartre for a true local experience. We met up with Chef Constance Deledalle, who took us from market to market, explaining the nuances of French cheeses, bakeries, butcher shops and seafood mongers, as we collected ingredients that we would eventually take back to the Cook'N with Class kitchen and prepare and enjoy a five-course meal together.

A few hours into the experience, I had filled a notebook with interesting culinary tips and recipes and had a newfound sense of confidence in selecting French cheeses. More than a cooking class, it was an authentic experience that took the intimidation out of local market shopping and in true French fashion, emphasized the pleasures of eating and drinking.

To work off the béarnaise-smothered filet and chocolate ganache tart, we took a leisurely stroll along the river, sifting through the packed stalls of the *bouquinistes*, the second-hand booksellers who line the banks of the Seine. I always love to find something unique to bring home, and this time didn't disappoint.

After a casual dinner at Cafe Le Bonaparte, surrounded by locals grazing elbows in cozy booths, we strolled through the Latin Quarter for a nightcap at Le Caveau de la Huchette,



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a jazz bar I stumbled upon years ago. Guide books can be helpful, but there's a certain satisfaction to finding something on your own—and then finding it all over again when you had forgotten about it.

In the morning, Bar du Central was our first stop for *petit déjeuner*. In years past, I've always been sorely aware of how expensive Paris is, but for the first time in a while, the dollar is so strong that breakfast was a steal. For eight dollars, I had a perfect café crème, fresh-squeezed orange juice, a croissant and fresh jam.

Charged for a day of "nothing," we made our way to Saint-Germain-des-Prés and simply wandered. It was a vibrant Saturday, with people of all ages doing the same thing. Families out doing their weekly shopping, couples walking hand in hand, tourists snapping photos and kids playing ball.

Bookstore La Hune caught my eye, and I soon found myself loaded up with books for my children. A few doors down, Flamant beckoned us with its elegant window display. It reminded me of Restoration Hardware, with a French twist. I spent the better part of an hour trying to figure out how I was going to get half of the store home with me.

Eventually exiting the back side of the store, we found ourselves in a courtyard facing Le Maison du Chou, a tiny storefront that sells fresh *choux* (puff) pastries. They are filled to order and expire at the end of the day, so you have no choice but to eat them immediately. The salted caramel blended with the fromage blanc was enough to convince me I had found the best thing I'd ever put in my mouth.

After a visit to Le Bon Marché, and its culinary counterpart, La Grande Epicerie de Paris (where I loaded up on edible gifts), we found ourselves in a wine bar near the Louvre called O Chateau. We joined a winetasting class in a wine cave below the bar and soon found ourselves learning the basics of French wine among several Parisians on a date night. The bar takes pride in wine education and offers more wines by the glass than any other bar in Paris.

On my final day, Sunday, I met up with one of the couples I had met the night before and we had brunch in Le Marais, the artsy, bohemian neighborhood opposite Notre Dame. We sank into armchairs at Le Café Livres, surrounded by shelves of books, and spent several hours swapping stories about life in our respective countries.

Most shops are closed on Sundays, so again, we wandered. On my last evening, I sat in a brasserie, drinking a glass of wine, feeling completely recharged and content with my trip. An American couple next to me asked me what I had done so far while in Paris. I just smiled and said, "Not much."

