

Trip to Paris, France - April 2006



A short summary

This trip report will focus on the trip that my wife Nikki and I took to Paris in the period from **April 8th - 15th 2006**. The trip report is split into sections. This first part has a focus on our stay in Paris and what we did and saw there, the second part will focus on [eating and drinking in Paris](#), third page will have [more pictures](#) and the last page contains a [short review of the hotel we used](#) (**TimHotel Tour Eiffel**). Please get in touch with me on by [e-mail](#) if you have any questions or comments. Most pictures are taken by Nikki and Gard with our Canon Powershot S1 IS camera and a couple are taken by my friend Olav (like the one to the right here). So is this trip report the ultimate Paris guide? The answer is of course "no". But I hope that this guide together with guidebooks, other trip reports on the net and internet forums can help you to prepare so that you can have an ultimate Paris experience :-)



Prelude

I went to Paris for the first time in 1994 and it was my first visit to a major European city. I was completely blown away but the monuments, buildings, bridges, the history etc. In 1999 my wife Nikki and I [went there together](#) as our first get away after she moved to Norway and this time we spent more time in the city and we had a chance to see a lot. So based on this it goes without saying that Paris has a special place in my heart.

I'm a bit "nervous" when it comes to making this trip report. Other than [Rome](#) and [London](#), I guess Paris is one of the classical destinations that many people end up visiting at one point in their lives. Over the years the [gardkarlsen.com](#) homepage has attracted more and more readers and now there are close to 3000 visitors every day. So I guess (and hope) that a lot of people will read this trip report. I hope that people will find this trip report both helpful and entertaining.



Map provided by www.lonelyplanet.com. Please note that the map is clickable!

Planning the trip

When the special offer from [SAS](#) came along we decided to go for it. The ticket were "only" about 170 € per person and we would fly SAS' new direct flight from Stavanger to Paris. I told my friends Olav/Allis about this and they decided to join us for the first couple of days. The standard challenge when going on a trip like this is finding out which hotel to use. The last time we ended up at a hotel near Place de la Republique but this time we ended up at a hotel called [TimHotel Tour Eiffel](#) located in the 15th arrondissement (see location on [this map](#)).



The trip begins



A couple of days before the trip we were afraid that the trip would go down the drain. SAS went on strike and many flights were cancelled. But we called them and they were kind enough to book us on KLM instead. So at the crack of dawn on April 8th we went to the Stavanger airport ready to check in. But when we came to the check in counter we got a bit of a shock. KLM told us that we had no ticket with them! We went to SAS and they informed us that we didn't have a ticket with them either as the tickets had been cancelled when SAS had booked us on the KLM flight. To make a long story short...we got stand-by tickets for the SAS flight and we got some of the last seats on the plane :-). So after a shaky start and a 1 ½ hour flight, we landed at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris.

Arriving in Paris

We arrived at [Charles de Gaulle airport](#) at about 11 am and the weather was not all that great. It was not raining but it was only about 12 degrees Celsius. But hey, it was better than the cold weather we had left behind in Stavanger. I have to say it right away...my impression of the Charles de Gaulle airport is not very positive. We had to wait for quite some time to get our suitcases but I think it was getting out of the airport and to Paris that were the main "challenge". Nikki and I have travelled a bit, so we are pretty used to getting around but we were a bit confused at CdG. We knew that we wanted to take the **RER B** train into Paris but it was hard to find it. After taking the elevator to the right floor, we found the shuttle bus that



would take us to the train station. When we arrived at the train station it was not very well marked so we had to ask the bus driver if it was the right stop. Inside there was a long queue to get tickets from a counter and only 3 machines where you could buy the tickets electronically. My French is not that great but my friend Olav and I were able to buy tickets from a ticket machine and it costs about 8 € to take the train into Paris. We took the train to

Denfert Rochereau and there we switched to a metro line that took us to

Dupleix and the hotel was just around the corner. Remember that if you are going to use this method it is important to understand that many of the metro stations don't have escalators/lifts and they can be HUGE so keep it in mind before you stuff too much into your Samsonite suitcase :-). You can use this [RATP site](#) to plan your trip.

How to get around Paris – the ABC of taking the metro

Paris is a big city and it is of course great to walk around the entire city looking at famous monuments, museums, gardens, churches etc. But eventually you'll get worn out from all the walking and then you need a good and fast way to get around. In Paris the best option is the metro, in my opinion. I like to take the subway in different cities in the world and I just love the metro in Paris. There are stations everywhere and it is easy to figure out how to use it. Here is a little ABC the way I see it.

You can buy single tickets for about 1.40 €. You can also buy a so called carnet - 10 single tickets that cost about 10.7 €. There are different zones than trains travel in but most of the main attractions of Paris are located within zones 1 and 2. Once you enter the metro you can ride it and change trains as many times as you want. But once you exit you have to get a new ticket. If you are staying for a longer period of time you might want to consider a metro pass. We bought the **Carte Orange** which is a weekly pass that lasts from Monday to Sunday and it costs about 16 € for zones 1 and 2. Get a guidebook that contains a good metro map so that you can find out where the stations are located and so that you can plan the easiest way to get from A to B. You can also find metro maps outside and inside the metro stations so that you can plan your trip. Here is a [metro map](#) taken from the RATP homepage.



When you enter a metro station you have to find out which line you want to take (if there are more than one at the station). Once you have decided on that and follow the signs you will also have to decide which direction you want to go in. Normally the directions are indicated by the name of the end stations of the line. But in many cases there are also posters showing which stations you will pass through if you go in that direction. Some of the metro stations are huge and can be a bit confusing. We came to the big metro and

RER station Châtelet-Les Halles one day and we walked to find the exit. After a while we came back to the point of origin and we had a good laugh when we found out that we had been walking in a big circle. But if you just follow the "Sortie" signs you should be able to find your way out.

Don't be surprised if you get some entertainment on and in and around the metro. We experienced everything from really bad singing on board the metro to a big band playing classical music at a metro station. Nothing beats the early morning shock we got when a Latino band behind us went from strumming a few guitar strings to a full party modus when the rest of the members joined in!

Sightseeing in Paris – where to start

Paris is big, there is so much to see and do and I'm not really sure where to start. Once again I have to recommend getting a guidebook so that you can plan ahead. Remember that you can't cover all of Paris in a couple of days so you have to make sacrifices I'm afraid, if you are there on a short stay. Since we have been to Paris before we had the pleasure of taking it "easy" this time but we still wanted to see many of the places that we went to the last time. Here is a list of some of the stuff we did while we were in Paris.

The symbol of Paris – the Eiffel Tower



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I don't think there are many monuments that are as famous as the Eiffel Tower. You can see it on postcards, T-shirts, souvenirs etc...and in every movie where the action takes place in Paris it always seems like the flat has a view to the Tower :-). The Tower must be one of the most visited tourist attractions in Paris with about 6 million each year! We had a hotel pretty close to the tower so it didn't take us long after we had arrived before we were standing in the park in front of the Tower (Parc du Champs de Mars) admiring this "aging" beauty. The 324 meter tower was built in connection with the Universal Exhibition in celebration of the French Revolution in 1889. On our previous trip to Paris we went up the Tower



at night so this time we decided to go there on a sunny afternoon. We came by the metro to the **Bir-Hakeim** station and we just walked over to the Tower along the Seine. Under the Tower there were long queues of people - even from 4 different entrances! We chose the shortest of the queues: the one where you get to walk to the second level :-). I guess we had to wait for about 30 minutes and after paying 3.8 € per person we were on our way up the stairs. I think there are about 700 steps but it went surprisingly fast. OK, I

admit that we had a break on level 1. When you walk around on the first level there are posters that have historical facts on them, there are historical artefacts (e.g. part of the original spirial staircase used by Gustav Eiffel) and you get a good view of the city and the lines below the Tower. I was afraid that there would be no toilets but there was no need to worry...there are toilets at least on the level 1 and 2. The level 2 section is smaller than level 1 of course but the view is even better here. We had a break here and sat down to write some postcards.



We had to wait to get some tickets for the elevator to the top level as you can't use the stairs all the way up (I think it would have been great to walk all the way up). We



had to pay another 3.30 € per person to take the lift from level 2 to level 3. So as the sun were setting and the shadow of the Tower created a shadow over the roof tops, Nikki and I were standing in line to get to the top. The line here is also quite long but we got into the elevator eventually and soon we were heading to the top. The ride doesn't take very long and it gives you some time to look at the view...or study the structure to see if you can spot any rust problems :-). I think they repaint it every 5 years but it is hard to not

think about the fact that the Tower is more than 100 years old. The top level was crowded and you have to "fight" a bit to get a good view. But the view of the city is great indeed. We didn't stay at the top that long..it was getting colder as the sun set. Getting down is much faster and within minutes we were on the ground looking up at the Tower again. At night it is illuminated and every hour the Tower comes alive when it is [illuminated by sparkling lights for 10 minutes](#) (link contains a 1 MB video). The Eiffel Tower is a must see in Paris but be prepared for long lines to get in.

Tip! If you are fit and up to it why not take the stairs to level 2 and take the lift from there? Check out [the homepage of the Tower](#) to plan your visit. It seems like there is lots of useful info on it.

In the footsteps of Robert Langdon – The Da Vinci Code Walking Tour

Before we came to Paris we had decided that we wanted to take a short tour just for fun. At some stage we were looking into doing a [Segway tour](#) but I guess I'm a bit of a cheapskate...I found it a bit too expensive - especially when it doesn't include entry tickets to places of interest. We did see them roll around in Paris while we were there and it does look like fun. In the end we decided to go for the [DaVinci code tour](#). I guess you are all familiar with the book The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown :-). The movie screens from mid-May 2006 so there has been and is a lot of talk about it.



At 10 am one morning we made our way to **Place Vendôme** to the meeting point in front of the Ritz hotel. This is where Robert Langdon (the main character in the book) stays and where the action starts. We paid 20 € each to our guide and off we went together with about 15 others. We walked from the starting point to **Jardin des Tuileries** (the garden outside Louvre) and from there on we walked into the inverted pyramid inside the **Louvre**. Our

guide was not just telling us about Paris, the book etc. She also tried to involve us by asking questions and trying to get people to get to know each other a little bit. After the chance of buying a drink and going to the bathroom at the Louvre we continued our walk. We crossed the Seine and walked to the churches of St-Germain-des-Pres and **St. Sulpice**.

Taking a tour like this was fun especially since we had read the book and were looking forward to the movie. But there are lots of different walks to go for. Check out the [Classic walks homepage](#) for more info.

The mother of all museums – The Louvre

Once a fortress to protect Paris against Viking raids and then extended by kings and emperors over centuries. Today the building itself is huge and it houses an enormous art collection. Apart from the Eiffel tower this must be another place that is hard to miss when in Paris. We decided to go there after we had the Da Vinci walk.

Tip! Remember that there are a couple of entrances for the museum. Many people line up at the famous glass pyramid but it is also possible to enter the museum near Carrousel du Louvre. We bought tickets from the ticket machines under the pyramid and it cost 8.50 € per person. It was a bit on the cold side outside so we had lots of clothes on. Luckily they had a service where we could hang up our jackets whilst appreciating the many works of art.



With such a huge museum it is very hard to know where to start. We decided to get an audio guide to help us along the way. Nikki took care of it by leaving her drivers license and paying 5 €. The audio guide covers about 1000 of the 35.000 works of art spread out over an area of 60.000 square meters! It goes without saying that you can't cover it all so it is best to plan a bit ahead for what you want to see. We were not allowed to take pictures in many areas of the Louvre and flash photography is not allowed at all. At first I was a bit annoyed by this but this means that you can just use the time and energy to look at the works :-). And besides...you can find all the paintings online on the Louvre homepage. We continued in the Da Vinci code track and continued to walk in the footsteps of Mr. Langdon. By the way...I tried out the toilet that is mentioned in the book and there is no way they could have thrown the soap out of a window :-).



The most famous painting of them all is the **Mona Lisa by Leonard da Vinci**. But there are so many other amazing paintings to look at and some are so big that you can look at them for quite some time and find something new all the time. There are a few benches and sofas that you can sit down in if you get tired or want more time to study a painting. If you move around there are paintings, sculptures, Greek art, Egyptian artifacts etc. Take a look at the [Louvre homepage](#) before you go there to plan your visit. And if you want to take a look at all the works check out the [Atlas database](#).

We got hungry eventually from the walking around in the museum and we grabbed a snack at the museum food court before leaving using the metro station that is connected to the museum.

Train station gone cultural – Musée d'Orsay

While we are talking about great museums...right across the river from the Louvre you will find Musée d'Orsay. Originally this building was built as a train station in 1900. But after 1939 it was not much in use since it couldn't handle the modern longer trains. So what do you do with an old train station? In the 1970's there were debates whether the station should be demolished or not.



To make a long story short they kept it and turned it into **Musée d'Orsay**. We came there in the afternoon and there was still a line to get in. The tickets are normally 8.50 € but since we came late we got it for 5.50 €. When entering the museum it doesn't look that big. But there are several levels and "hidden" rooms. Here you can see paintings of Monet, Renoir, Munch, Degas, Van Gogh, a version of Rodin's "The Gates of Hell", sculptures etc. Check out the impressive clock located on the wall above the entrance. I wonder if this was there originally when the building functioned as a train station :-). As usual you can find more useful information on the [museum homepage](#).



Arc de Triomphe & Champs-Élysées

I feel like I'm repeating myself but the [Arc de Triomphe](#) is another Parisian symbol that most people are familiar with. If you stand in the Jardin des Tuileries outside the Louvre you can see the monument behind the obelisk at Place de la Concorde. After a great victory in 1805 Napoleon promised that his army would go home under triumphal arches. I guess this is not a new idea as there are really old arches like this in e.g. [Rome](#). The Arc de Triomphe was



finished in 1836 and today it is a national symbol. We think it is a great place as you get a very good view from the 50 meter rooftop terrace and I have been there on all three trips to Paris :-). We paid 7.50 € for the ticket and made our way towards the top. There are a few steps along the way but the view you get is worth it. On the roof there are a couple of fixed binoculars if you want to get a look and there are boards



identifying the different buildings that you see around Paris. We like the structure of the avenues stretching out from the arch towards places like e.g. **Place de la Concorde** and **la Défense**. And it is always fun to look down at the cars in the roundabout that goes around the monument. There are no lanemarkings so how they figure out where to drive is a mystery :-). Is it just me or has the fence around the rooftop terrace been increased in height?



When looking at [old pictures](#) it looks like it and this time it was a bit hard to take a nice picture with e.g. the Eiffel tower in the background due to the fence.



There is also stuff to see on the ground level. Walking around you'll see the **tomb of the Unknown Soldier**, reliefs portraying famous battles, names of officers etc. The one relief that captures the eye is the "Le Départ des Volontaires de 1792" better known as "La Marseillaise". It is easy to get to Arc de Triomphe by the way as there is a metro station there. Remember that you should not try to sprint across the road to get out to the monument...there is a pedestrian tunnel leading out to it that you are supposed to use.

We decided to walk down the avenue of Champs-Élysées as we left the arch. There are lots to see as you walk down the street by the way. Major car brands like Peugeot, Renault, Mercedes etc have their show case stores here where they display current models, Formula1 cars, future cars etc. But there are also brand name clothing stores and lots of restaurants and cinemas.

Home of Quasimodo? – Notre Dame

When we went to [Paris the last time](#) we did visit the [cathedral of Notre Dame](#) but we never made it to the towers. So our goal this time was to visit the towers and take a closer look at the gargoyles. But I'm afraid that we were disappointed. The line to get it was so long and they only let in 20 people every 10 minute so we gave up our initial plan. I guess we also figured out that we were satisfied seeing Paris from above as we had been to places like the Eiffel tower, Arc de Triomphe etc.



The church is located on the island of **Ile de la Cité** which is believed to be the very cradle of Paris. Built on a Roman temple the first stone for the church was laid down in 1163 AD and it must have been an impressive sight when it was finished. With its 69 meter high towers it is still impressive today. We took a walk inside the church itself and it was pretty packed with other tourists. Around the church there are paintings, sculptures etc but I guess the most impressive are the huge rose windows. It is an impressive church but after visiting Rome's amazing St. Peter's basilica ([Basilica di San Pietro](#)) I think that Notre Dame has to settle for a second place.

It is nice taking a walk around the outside of the church itself too. The square in front of the church is packed with tourists trying to capture the entire Notre Dame façade in one frame. There was one woman, we assume she was begging, that kept on asking Nikki "Do you speak English" and trying to push a printed note in her face...and she kept on asking over and over again. We walked around to take a look at the church and its flying buttresses construction from square du Jean XXIII. It seems like the Vikings are planning to launch a new attack on the city by the way...on the Seine we saw a small Viking ship and I think I even saw a small Norwegian flag :-)



We walked from Notre Dame towards the church of **Sainte-Chapelle**. But once again we were discouraged by the long line to get in so we decided to come back another day but unfortunately we never made it back. I understand this is one of the churches that should not be missed...so I guess I still have something to see the next time I get to Paris :-). Instead we walked across the river to the right bank and passed **Hôtel de Ville** on our way towards **Pompidou Center**. Hôtel de Ville is the home of the mayor and city council and it is a reconstruction of a town hall situated here. The building itself is beautiful but the square in front of the building was once the main site for all sorts of executions. The guidebook describes an execution where a man was tied to 4 strong horses and ripped to pieces. It seems like mans creativity has no ends when it comes to horrifying stuff like this.

Pompidou and Marais

When walking from Notre Dame it didn't take us long to get to [Centre Pompidou](#). We had a vague plan to visit it but the plans were terminated when we found out that the museum is closed every Tuesday. But I'm not really into



modern art anyway so it was not a big issue for me. The most fascinating thing about the Centre Pompidou is the building itself. It seems like they have turned it inside out so there are pipes, steel, escalators etc everywhere...the building stands out in other words. This area is not very far from the shopping center **Les Halles** and I think it is one of the few places in Paris where we felt a bit uncomfortable with our surroundings. With the crowds I guess it is an ideal place for pickpockets to operate. But there are some fun things in the area...like the colorful fountain on Place Igor Stravinsky, the public clock "Le défenseur du temps" or the Fontaine des Innocents which stands on the site of a former grave yard...I will get back to this when we talk about the catacombs. The public clock "Le défenseur du temps" looks great but



according to the guidebook the real action only takes place at 2 pm and 6 pm :-). We stood next to an American family and they seemed to be quite disappointed when nothing much happened when the clock struck 1 pm.

Les Halles has shops, restaurants, cinema, book shops...there is even a big swimming pool in there. We went to the movies one night and when we came out at 8-9 pm the shops were closed and so were many of the exits. We had to use a bit of time to find our way out of the maze :-)

Back to our walk...we continued to walk from the Les Halles area towards **Place de la Bastille** and this part of the city is called **Marais**. The streets are narrow and it seems very quiet at least if you are coming from the Les Halles area. I think this is Paris' Jewish quarter - some good falafel shops too. On the way we passed by Musée Picasso, maison de Victor Hugo but we only stopped at **place des Vosges** which was Paris' very first square built in 1609. This used to be the home for the aristocracy but today it is just a nice symmetrical square where people enjoyed the spring sun, relaxed on benches while the kids were playing in the sand box or playing football. It was only another few minutes to Place de la Bastille but this does not really contain that much interesting today. Once home of the infamous prison that sparked the revolution in 1789...today there is nothing left of the prison. There is just a column in the middle of the intersection know as "Colonne de Juillet".



The white church on the hill - Sacré-Coeur



The Sacré-Coeur basilica is located in the Montmartre area and it is a great place to visit on a nice clear day. The church is located on a hill and the view from this point is spectacular. According to the guidebook the top of the church is in fact the second highest point in Paris after the Eiffel tower. We took the metro up to the area and it is a bit of a strange area. When we went to Paris the last time we stayed a night in the Pigalle area and it is not the best neighborhood. This is Paris' red light district. We had a bit of a laugh

when we saw TimHotel (the chain of hotel we used) had a hotel that were next door to this huge neon lit building with Sexodrome on it...I guess they don't make a point out of that in the advertising. In the same area you will also find the famous Moulin Rouge.

Back to the church...it is a short walk up to the church itself from Anvers metro station but it is uphill so there is even a short "train service" there. We are still young and fit...well, at least a bit fit...so we walked up the stairs. At the beginning of the steps we were met by some people that wanted to give us some bracelets for "free". There are not that much that comes for free



these days so we said no in a polite manner and continued up the stairs. The white church is beautiful against the blue sky and it is nice to sit down in the stairs and relax and look at the view of Paris. We wanted to get a bit higher so we decided to climb up to the dome itself. There is an unmanned entrance in the front, down to the left - tickets are 5 € from the automated machine. There are quite a lot of stairs to climb to get to the top but once again the view is worth it. Even if it was a



bit hazy we could still look down on the Pompidou Center, the Opera etc. Once back on the ground we also took a walk around the church inside but there was a service in progress so we didn't stay long.

We also walked the short distance to the Montmartre area. We didn't get very far from the church before we were "attacked" by artists that wanted to draw our portrait. We managed to say politely "no" to some and tried to navigate around others. But the streets in the area are quite nice...narrow and laid with cobblestone.

Home of kings - Château de Versailles

Once a small hunting lodge for Louis XIII, this place is now an amazing



palace. I guess we can thank Louis XIV (referred to as the Sun King) for this as he was the one who decided to stay here and make it into the largest palace in Europe. We took the train there one morning. Note that there are a couple of options on how to get there. We took the RER C line from Invalides I think but you can also take a SNCF train from Montparnasse station. In both cases you end up at the train station Château de Versailles after 30-40 minutes. I think that we paid about 5 € for a round trip.



We took the short 5-10 minute walk from the train station at Versailles to the court yard of the palace. There are buses with, Versailles Palace signs, waiting right outside the station - which gives the wrong impression of a long ride to get there. Unfortunately for us, there was a bit of construction work going on so parts of the court yard were being dug up. We had planned our trip in advance on the net and we had decided to go for a guided tour. So instead of lining up on the right (entrance A), we went to the ticket office at entrance C

and bought a tour for 15 € each. This gave us a standard access to the palace and a tour of the Louis XV/XVI private apartments and the opera house. But one of the best things about this ticket was the fact that we could use another entrance (entrance B) instead of lining up with the rest :-). So we went in, check in our backpack so that we didn't have to drag that around and started walking around the palace. Some of the rooms have been refurbished but



there is still work in progress also inside the building. Half of the hall of mirrors is for instance covered up due to maintenance work and it will open again in 2007 - we hope. But there is lots of stuff to admire here from the entrance where you get a view to Chapelle Royale (the royal chapel) and rooms like the king and queens bedchamber etc. The rooms were crowded (just like the last time we visited) and there are lots of tour groups. I guess we spent a couple of hours there before we had to run for our guided tour appointment. One thing that I found a bit strange is that we were led out in the garden after the walk through the palace came to an end. The only problem was that it was freezing outside and we had left the jackets in the backpack at the entrance. So we had to make a run for it to get back into proper clothes :-).



The guided tour took us into the private apartments of Louis XV and XVI and the woman who took us around explained the life for a king in the palace, about the palace's fate after the revolution and how they now are trying to buy stuff back for the palace etc. There seems to be some priceless items there like an old clock that can indicate moon phase, year, day etc. We were equipped with an ear piece so it was not a problem to hear what the guide was saying but her English could've been a bit better for a guide. There were a couple of families on the tour and one kid got a mild reprimand when he leaned against the one of the unprotected walls. The poor kid was made aware of his actions in front of the whole tour group and blushed accordingly :-). We also got a quick look into the opera house that was built during the reign of Louis XV. The opera has about 700 seats and at the time they needed 10.000 candles every night to light it. I think it is a miracle that it never went up in flames.



We also visited the garden but it was still early spring when we went there so the flowers were not in bloom and the fountains were not running. They call it a garden but it is slightly bigger than what I normally associate with a garden :-). It is about 3.5 km (over 2 miles) from the palace to the end of the little pond (called Grand Canal). So if you are planning to take a stroll around the garden make sure that you have enough time. If you are short on time it is possible to take a train shuttle around in the garden. The garden is filled with

hedges cut to precision, trees cut in funky shapes, sculptures (I even spotted a copy of Laocöon, one of my favorite pieces at the Vatican museum) etc.

On the way back we used the opportunity to take a closer look at the marble courtyard in the front of the palace. We also stopped at the small restaurant to get something to eat before the guided tour. It is fairly small so it was pretty crowded and we were just lucky to get a seat. They served small stuff like cheese/ham toast, pizza and they also had some pretty good waffles that Nikki enjoyed :-). There are not many toilets around so be prepared to queue and keep your 0.5 € ready.



Versailles is absolutely worth a visit. The guided tour was also a bonus for us having only referred to our guidebook when checking out the rest of Versailles. Think back and imagine how amazing this must have been towards



the end of the 1600s when the Sun king was in power here. The palace and gardens which is impressive today must have been out of this world in those times. Other historic events have also taken place here. Germany signed the surrender in the hall of mirrors after World War I if I'm not mistaken. Check out the [palace homepage](#) to plan your visit and read more about the palace, kings etc.

The empire of the dead – the Catacombs

When I went to school as a young boy I remember that we learned about the catacombs of Rome in connection with religion history. When we went to [Rome last year](#) we never got a chance to check it out so we decided to see the Parisian catacombs instead. The catacombs in Paris were built in 1786 and from what I understand they moved bones and corpses from a cemetery near Les Halles because of sanitary reasons. They used more than a year to transport all the remains across the city at night.



It was easy to find the entrance of the catacombs. When we came out of the metro station at **Denfert Rochereau** we saw a line waiting in front of the entrance. There was a sign saying that there was a limit of about 100 people at the time. We waited about 10 minutes, paid 5 € for the ticket and then we were on our way under ground. We started that day at Sacré-Coeur so I guess you can say that we went from top to bottom in one day. After a few downward spiralling stairs I guess we were about 20 meters underground and in the first rooms there was information about how the place was originally a quarry, how it was built etc. After walking for quite a while in dimly lit corridors we reached the entrance of the catacombs itself. A sign over the door says "Arrete! C'est ici L'Empire de la Morte" which translates into something like "Stop! This is the empire of the dead". Once we got in we were stunned by the number of bones and skulls that lined the walls. I guess I was expecting to see a few bones but it just goes on and on. In some places the skulls are intact, others were fractured and in some places the skulls formed a pattern in between the many bones. The walk from the starting point to the finish is about 1.7 km (about 1 mile) long. So be prepared to walk for 20-30 minutes surrounded by skulls and bones - and there are no lavatories.



Tip! The catacombs have limited opening hours (I think it is only from 2 pm and 4 pm on Tuesdays to Fridays) and a bit more in the weekend. Also be aware that the exit is far from the entrance. I'm not sure where we came out...we just found the nearest main street and found a metro station.

A walk around the Thinker – Musée Rodin

We have come across the work of Rodin in different parts of the world. We saw a version of The Gates of Hell in [Tokyo](#) and also at the Louvre. But I guess the most famous work of Auguste Rodin is the sculpture known as the Thinker.



We took the metro to La Tour Maubourg and we came up right at the Hôtel des Invalides. There is a little park in front of the building and you get a pretty good view of the fabulous bridge of Pont Alexandre III, the Eiffel tower and the golden dome of the Dôme church where you can find Napoleon's tomb.

We walked to the Musée Rodin and paid about 6 € to get in. Once inside you are actually outside...in the garden of Hôtel Biron the mansion that was Rodin's home and place

of work for many years. The Thinker is on display right after you come in and people were taking pictures, some were trying to capture the moment by sketching etc. We were there on a nice day and it was great to walk around in the quiet garden and enjoy the first signs of spring. Other famous works are The Gates of Hell, Ugolino, The Monument to Balzac, The Monument to the Burghers of Calais etc. There are also works on display inside the mansion. Check out the [homepage of the museum](#) for more information about the museum and Rodin's work.



Walkabout



Nikki made the fateful error of getting her hair done at an overpriced (her words, not mine) place near the Opera. That gave me a chance to walk a bit around on my own. I started out by walking the short distance to the church [La Madeleine](#). This church might not be that old but it is huge and it is built like a Greek or Roman temple so it stands out. I made a run for it to get a across the road to enter the church (crossing the roads can be an extreme sport in Paris). I only walked around inside for a few minutes. I guess I find

the traditional churches more beautiful.

From Madeleine it is just a few minutes to **Place de la Concorde**. This huge open place is today the home of a couple of fountains, statues personifying French cities and in the middle a 230 ton, 3200 year old Egyptian obelisk. But this was also the courtyard where the guillotine was in use after the French revolution and people like Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and several thousands of others lost their head. When you on the square today you get a good view towards the Arc de Triomphe in one direction (as this square is the beginning of Champs Elysées) and a view to Jardin des Tuileries and the Louvre in the other direction.



I continued my walk along the river Seine towards the beautiful bridge of **Pont Alexandre III**. There are two granite pillars on each side of the bridge with golden statues on top. Again it is possible to get good views. On the bridge itself you can look towards the obelisk on Place de la Concorde, look towards the golden dome of the Dôme church and Hôtel des Invalides and you also get a good view to Grand Palais. I walked across the bridge, looked at the other tourists and helped some couples taking pictures with a nice Paris view in the background and took some pictures myself of course. In the end I had to rush back to meet Nikki but there is always a metro station near by the can be used.

Shopping

We didn't really do that much shopping in Paris...well, I didn't but I guess Nikki found a thing or two :-). We did stop by [Galeries Lafayette](#) a few times and it is a huge department store that has a lot of stuff. But a lot of it is up marked stuff so I guess it depends on how much you are willing to cough up for certain items :-). But they had an excellent coffee shop at least...stop by [Café Malongo](#). They also have an amazing wine shop (or wine library as they called it) where it was possible to buy vintage wine and cognac. They also have an outstanding food section where you can get all sorts of good stuff ranging from bread to foie gras.



We also visited the neighboring department store [Printemps](#) but I found that very boring. I tried to make my way to the top floor to check out the roof top terrace but it was closed due to construction work. But from one of the bridges that takes you from one building to the other I spotted a sports store that I could visit.

We also went to [Les Halles](#) and this seems to be the place where the younger people hang out. The place is a bit of a maze but you can find shops like Mango, Zara, KOOKAI etc. There are even two cinemas in the centre. The last time we went to Paris we ended up on the roof top terrace of the "La Samaritaine" by accident. But when we walked past it this time it seemed like it was closed down. But it looks like their [homepage](#) is still operational.

Time to go home

Saturday April 15th was our last day in Paris. We spent the last day browsing around: doing some last minute shopping, drinking some good coffee etc. During the week we were there it was pretty cold and on the last day we also got a bit of rain. We had a flight at about 7.30 pm so we decided to start heading for the airport at about 3 pm. Seasoned as we like to think we are, we almost hopped on the train all the way to CDG airport without our passports!. Fortunately Nikki's managed to remember before the train journey began *whew* We used the same route to CDG airport as when we arrived (RER B via Denfert Rochereau) and soon we were sitting at the airport waiting for our flight. If you want to do some shopping or eating you should stick to the centre of the airport. Our "satellite" (no. 7) departure gate only had a hole in the wall coffee shop and a duty free shop slightly larger than our Paris hotel room!




Conclusion

I'm sure that I will get a few questions about why we didn't visit this or that. When we went to Paris the last time we did visit places like La Défense, the Dôme church and Napoleons tomb, the Pantheon church, Cité de Science, Jardin de Luxembourg etc so I feel that we have been able to cover quite a lot of Paris during our two trips :-)



So was it magical being Paris again? I could have wished for better weather but apart from that I have to say that Paris still has a special place in my heart. Yes, there is an excessive amount of dog poop on the pavements all over the city; you might get hassled by overzealous beggars around the main attractions; you might have to pay a bit more than you'd like to to get into

 different main attractions; and you might have to queue up for a while to get into the most famous places. But I still think that Paris is an amazing city that can offer a lot when it comes to sights, well stocked museums, monuments, beautiful bridges. When we went to [Rome last year](#) I compared the two cities and I guess I came to the conclusion that Rome is my favorite European city. I think I will stick by the conclusion as Rome has better food, as it is smaller so it is easier to cover the place on foot and because I like the warm Rome weather better :-). But both cities are amazing and should not be missed if you have the chance of visiting.

On our last night in Paris, as we were walking back to the hotel, we walked past Parc du Champs de Mars with an amazing view to the [flashing Eiffel tower](#). And when we saw a man get down on his knee to propose to his girlfriend - the night was complete, for Nikki at least. I guess Paris is the city of love.

I hope that you found this trip report useful please give me feedback if you have comments or questions or I have made factual mistakes or if. I can be reached on gardkarlsen@hotmail.com. Please move to the next page and read about [eating and drinking in Paris](#). Below are some useful tips.

Some "useful" tips

So what do you need to bring to Paris? And how do you plan a trip to Paris? Here are some useful tips:

- A pair of good walking shoes: I guess this goes without saying but there is a lot to see in Paris and a lot of ground to cover so bring comfortable shoes.
- Wondering about the weather in Paris? Check out [weatherbase.com](#) to get some weather stats so you know what to expect. And check the weather forecast right before you go so that you know how cold/warm it could be.
- Are you staying for a week and planning to get around a lot? I would suggest that you get a Carte Orange so that you can use the metro as much as you want. Remember to bring along a passport sized photo for the metro pass.
- A good guidebook: yes, you can find a lot of useful info on the internet. But get a good guidebook with a comprehensive street map and a metro map. Which one to buy is up to you :-)
- Which forums to ask questions: Try [TripAdvisor](#), [Fodor's](#), [SlowTalk](#) and [Frommer's](#)
- Are you bringing a laptop? We did and it was great to use this to check out attractions and opening times, maps etc. There are wireless connections where you can buy surf time.
- Do you wonder how far it is from one place to another in Paris? Why not use [Google Earth](#) to measure? I find this to be a great tool.
- A pair of good eyes: I guess there is not much that can be done to improve this point...but you need your eyes to look at all the beautiful sights...and to spot and avoid all the dog poop on the pavements around town
- [Here is a map](#) where I have highlighted some of the places that we went to

Paris is divided into 20 different neighbourhoods called arrondissements. Here is a [map with the different arrondissements](#).

