



HISTORIC PARIS ROLL OR STROLL

From Notre-Dame to the Pont Neuf

Paris has been the cultural capital of Europe for centuries. We'll start where it did, on Ile de la Cité, with a foray onto the Left Bank, on a tour that laces together 80 generations of history: from Celtic fishing village to Roman city, bustling medieval capital, birthplace of the Revolution, bohemian haunt of the 1920s café scene, and the working world of modern Paris.

Allow four hours to do justice to this three-mile tour. If the distance seems too long, break it into pieces to make it more manageable. Stops along this tour have varying degrees of accessibility (as noted). Skip those portions that do not suit your mobility level, and move on to the next stop.

THE TOUR BEGINS

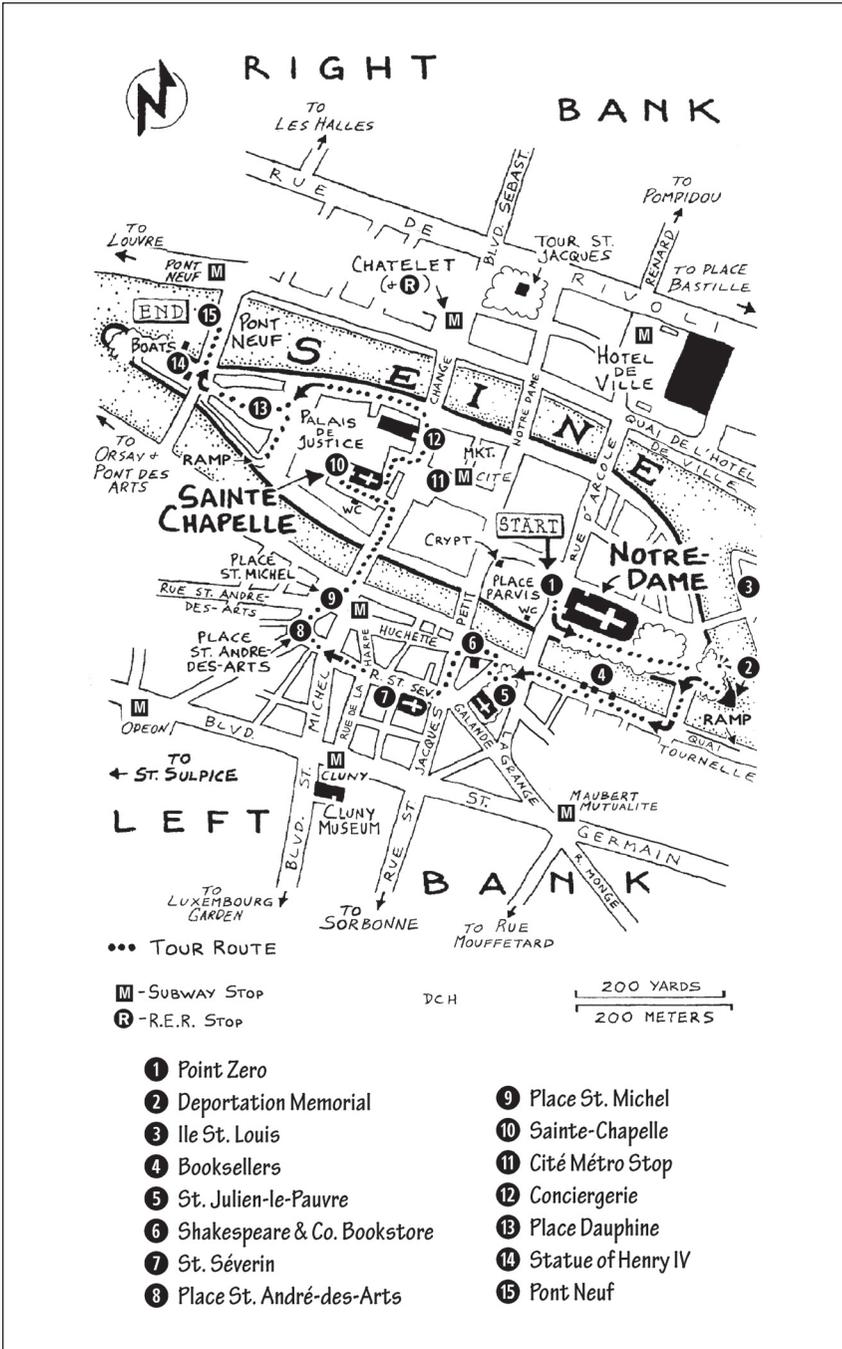
- *Start at Notre-Dame Cathedral on the island in the River Seine, the physical and historic bull's-eye of your Paris map. To get there, take a taxi or ride the Métro to Cité, Hôtel de Ville, or St. Michel and roll or stroll to the big square facing the cathedral.*

NOTRE-DAME

- *On the square in front of the cathedral, get far enough back to take in the whole facade. Look at the circular window in the center.*

For centuries, the main figure in the Christian “pantheon” has been Mary, the mother of Jesus. Catholics petition her in times of trouble to gain comfort, and to ask her to convince God to be compassionate with

Historic Paris Roll or Stroll





them. The church is dedicated to “Our Lady” (Notre-Dame), and there she is, cradling God, right in the heart of the facade, surrounded by the halo of the rose window. Though the church is massive and imposing, it has always stood for the grace and compassion of Mary, the “mother of God.”

Imagine the faith of the people who built this cathedral. They broke ground in 1163 with the hope that someday their great-

great-great-great-great-great grandchildren might attend the dedication Mass two centuries later, in 1345. Look up the 200-foot-tall bell towers and imagine a tiny medieval community mustering the money and energy for construction. Master masons supervised, but the people did much of the grunt work themselves for free—hauling the huge stones from distant quarries, digging a 30-foot-deep trench to lay the foundation, and treading like rats on a wheel designed to lift the stones up, one by one. This kind of backbreaking, arduous manual labor created the real hunchbacks of Notre-Dame.

• *Move toward the cathedral, and view it from the bronze plaque on the ground (30 yards from the central doorway) marked...*

Point Zero

You’re at the center of France, the point from which all distances are measured. It was also the center of Paris 2,300 years ago, when the Parisii tribe fished where the east–west river crossed a north–south road. The Romans conquered the Parisii and built their Temple of Jupiter where Notre-Dame stands today (52 B.C.). When Rome fell, the Germanic Franks sealed their victory by replacing the temple with the Christian church of St. Etienne in the sixth century. See the outlines of the former church in the pavement (in smaller gray stones), showing former walls and columns, angling out from Notre-Dame to Point Zero.

The grand equestrian statue (to your right, as you face the church) is of Charlemagne (“Charles the Great,” 742–814), King of the Franks, whose reign marked the birth of modern France. He briefly united Europe and was crowned the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800, but after his death, the kingdom was divided into what would become modern France and Germany. (There are clean, but not accessible, toilets

Paris Through History

- 250 B.C.** Small fishing village of the Parisii, a Celtic tribe.
- 52 B.C.** Julius Caesar conquers the Parisii capital of Lutetia (near Paris), and the Romans replace it with a new capital on the Left Bank.
- A.D. 497** Rome falls to the Germanic Franks. King Clovis (482–511) converts to Christianity and makes Paris his capital.
- 885–886** Paris gets wasted in siege by Viking Norsemen = Normans.
- 1163** Notre-Dame cornerstone laid.
- c. 1250** Paris is a bustling commercial city with a university and new construction, such as Sainte-Chapelle and Notre-Dame.
- c. 1600** King Henry IV beautifies Paris with buildings, roads, bridges, and squares.
- c. 1700** Louis XIV makes Versailles his capital, while Parisians grumble.
- 1789** Paris is the heart of France's Revolution, which condemns thousands to the guillotine.
- 1804** Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself emperor in a ceremony at Notre-Dame.
- 1830 & 1848** Parisians take to the streets again in revolutions, fighting the return of royalty.
- c. 1860** Napoleon's nephew, Napoleon III, builds Paris' wide boulevards.
- 1889** The centennial of the Revolution is celebrated with the Eiffel Tower. Paris enjoys wealth and middle-class prosperity in the belle époque (beautiful age).
- 1920s** After the draining Great War, Paris is a cheap place to live, attracting expatriates like Ernest Hemingway.
- 1940–1944** Occupied Paris spends the war years under gray skies and gray Nazi uniforms.
- 2006** You arrive in Paris to make history.

in front of the church near Charlemagne's statue—down twenty-five 7" steps.)

Before renovation 150 years ago, this square was much smaller, a characteristic medieval shambles facing a rundown church, surrounded by winding streets and higgledy-piggledy buildings. (Yellowed bricks in the pavement show the medieval street plan and even identify some of the buildings.) The church's huge bell towers rose above this tangle of smaller buildings, inspiring Victor Hugo's story of a deformed bell-ringer who could look down on all of Paris.

Looking two-thirds of the way up Notre-Dame's left tower, those with binoculars or good eyes can find Paris' most photographed gargoyle. Propped on his elbows on the balcony rail, he watches all the tourists in line.

• *Much of Paris' history is right underneath you. Some may consider visiting it in the...*

Archaeological Crypt

Access: Level 4—Not Accessible. There are fourteen 6" steps down to the entryway. The inside is mostly level.

Cost and Hours: €3.50, covered by Museum Pass, Tue–Sun 10:00–18:00, closed Mon.

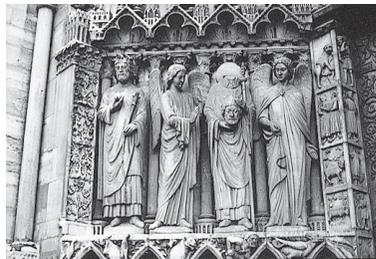
The Sight: Two thousand years of dirt and debris have raised the city's altitude. In the Crypt (entrance 100 yards in front of Notre-Dame's entrance), you can see cellars and foundations from many layers of Paris: a Roman building with central heating; a wall that didn't keep the Franks out; the main medieval road that once led grandly up the square to Notre-Dame; and even (wow) a 19th-century sewer.

• *Now turn your attention to the church facade. Look at the left doorway and, to the left of the door, find the statue with his head in his hands.*

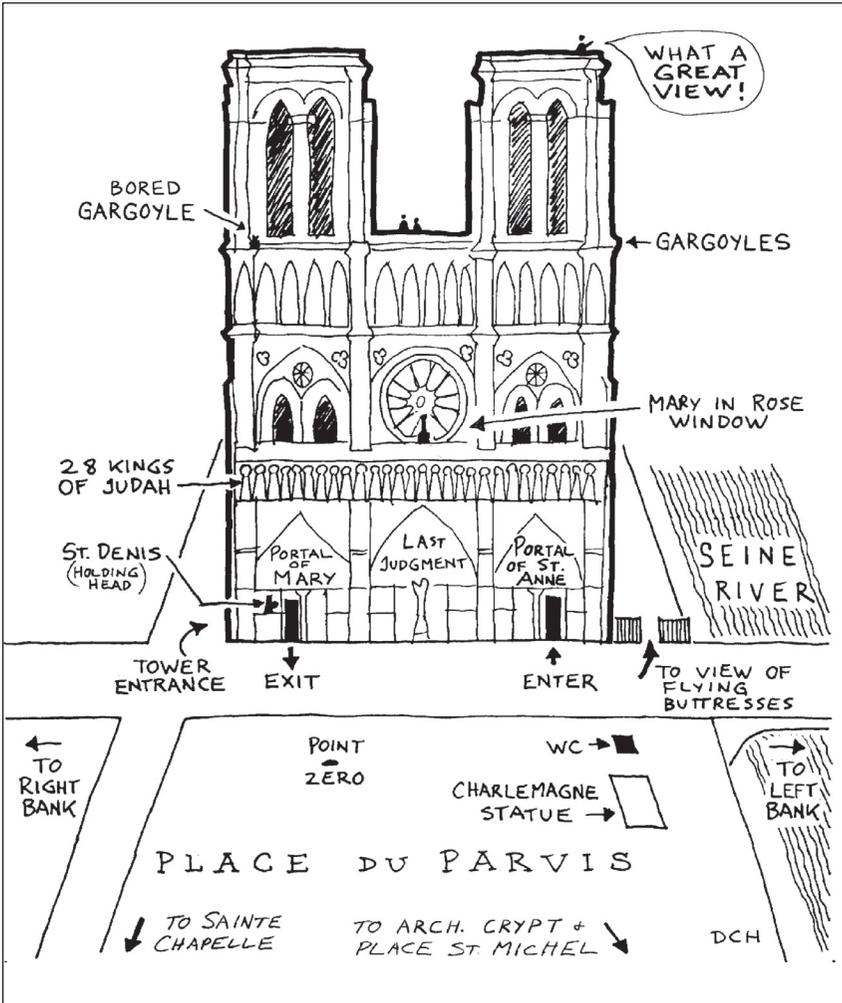
Notre-Dame Facade

St. Denis

When Christianity began making converts in Roman Paris, the bishop of Paris (St. Denis) was beheaded as a warning to those forsaking the Roman gods. But those early Christians were hard to keep down. St. Denis got up, tucked his head under his arm, headed north, paused at a fountain to



Notre-Dame Facade



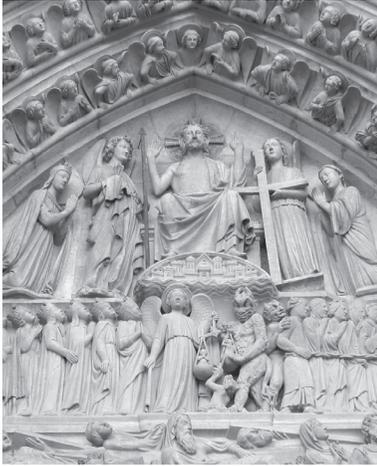
wash it off, and continued until he found just the right place to meet his maker. The Parisians were convinced by this miracle, Christianity gained ground, and a church soon replaced the pagan temple.

• *Above the central doorway, you'll find scenes from the Last Judgment.*



Central Portal

It's the end of the world, and Christ sits on the throne of judgment (just under the arches, holding both hands up). Below him, an angel and a



demon weigh souls in the balance; the demon cheats by pressing down. The good people stand to the left, gazing up to heaven. The naughty ones to the right are chained up and led off to a six-hour tour of the Louvre on a hot day. Notice the crazy, sculpted demons to the right, at the base of the arch. Find the flaming cauldron with the sinner diving into it head-first. The lower panel shows Judgment Day, as angels with trumpets remind worshippers that all social classes will be judged—clergy, nobility, army,

and peasants. Below that, Jesus stands between the 12 apostles—each barefoot and with his ID symbol (such as Peter with his keys).

• *Move back 10 yards. Above the arches is a row of 28 statues, known as...*

The Kings of Judah

In the days of the French Revolution (1789–1799), these Biblical kings were mistaken for the hated French kings, and Notre-Dame represented the oppressive Catholic hierarchy. The citizens stormed the church, crying, “Off with their heads!” Plop, they lopped off the crowned heads of these kings with glee, creating a row of St. Denises that wasn’t repaired for decades.

But the story doesn’t end there. A schoolteacher who lived nearby collected the heads and buried them in his backyard for safekeeping. There they slept until 1977, when they were accidentally unearthed. Today, you can stare into the eyes of the original kings in the Cluny Museum, a few blocks away.

• *Enter the church and find a spot where you can view the long, high central aisle. (Be careful: Pickpockets attend church here religiously.)*

Notre-Dame Interior

Access: AE, AI+A, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. The entryway and three-fourths of the main floor are wheelchair-accessible. There are three 6” steps to enter the area of the Mass and the treasury.

Cost and Hours: Entry to the church is free; it’s open daily 7:45–19:00;

treasury—€2.50 (not covered by Museum Pass), daily 9:30–17:30; Sunday Mass at 8:30, 10:00 (Gregorian), 11:30 (international), and 12:45. Tel. 01 42 34 56 10, www.cathedraldeparis.com.

Nave

Remove your metaphorical hat and become a simple bareheaded peasant, entering the dim medieval light of the church. Take a minute to let your pupils dilate, then take in the subtle, mysterious light show that God beams through the stained-glass windows. Follow the slender columns up 10 stories to the praying-hands arches of the ceiling, and contemplate the heavens. Let's say it's dedication day for this great stone wonder. The priest intones the words of the Mass that echo through the hall: "*Terribilis est locus iste*"—"This place is *terribilis*," meaning awe-inspiring or even terrifying. It's a huge, dark, earthly cavern lit with an unearthly light.

This is Gothic. Taller and filled with light, this was a major improvement over the earlier Romanesque style. Gothic architects needed only a few structural columns, topped by crisscrossing pointed arches to support the weight of the roof. This let them build higher than ever, freeing up the walls for windows.

Notre-Dame is designed in the shape of a cross, with the altar placed where the crossbeam intersects. The church can hold up to 10,000 faithful. And it's probably buzzing with visitors now, just as it was 800 years ago. The quiet, deserted churches we see elsewhere are in stark contrast to the busy, center-of-life places they were in the Middle Ages.

• *Approach the main altar.*

Altar

This marks the place where Mass is said and the bread and wine of Communion are blessed and distributed. In olden days, there were no chairs. This was the holy spot for Romans, Christians...and even atheists. When the Revolutionaries stormed the church, they gutted it and turned it into a "Temple of Reason." A woman dressed like the Statue of Liberty held court at the altar as a symbol of the divinity of Man. France today, while nominally Catholic, remains aloof from Vatican dogmatism. Instead of traditional wooden confessional booths, notice the open, glass-walled room (right aisle) where modern sinners seek counseling as much as forgiveness.

Right Transept (and Beyond)

A statue of Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc, 1412–1431), dressed in armor and praying, honors the French teenager who rallied French soldiers to try to

drive English invaders from Paris, before being burned at the stake for claiming to hear heavenly voices. Almost immediately, Parisians rallied to condemn Joan's execution, and finally, in 1909, here in Notre-Dame, the former "witch" was beatified.

Join the statue in gazing up to the blue-and-purple, rose-shaped window—with teeny green Mary and baby Jesus in the center—the only one of the three windows still with its original medieval glass.

A large painting back down to your right shows portly Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) teaching, while his students drink from the fountain of knowledge. This Italian monk did undergrad and master's work at the multicultural University of Paris, then taught there for several years while writing his theological works. His "scholasticism" used Aristotle's logic to examine the Christian universe, aiming to fuse faith and reason.

Just past the altar are the walls of the choir, where more intimate services can be held in this spacious building. Peeking inside, behind the altar, you'll see a fine 17th-century *pietà* flanked by two kneeling kings: Louis XIII and Louis XIV. The south walls of the choir have Gothic carvings (restored in the 19th century) showing scenes from the life of Christ after his Resurrection. Notice the niches below these carvings—they mark the tombs of centuries of archbishops. Surrounding the choir are chapels, each dedicated to a particular saint and funded by a particular guild. The faithful can pause at their favorite, light a candle as an offering, and meditate in the cool light of the stained glass. (The nearby treasury, containing lavish robes and golden reliquaries, lacks English explanations and probably isn't worth the €2.50 entry fee.)

• *Amble around the ambulatory, spill back outside, and make a slow U-turn left. Enter the park through the iron gates along the riverside.*

Notre-Dame Side View

Along the side of the church, you'll notice the flying buttresses. These 50-foot stone "beams" that stick out of the church were the key to the complex Gothic architecture. The pointed arches we saw inside caused the weight of the roof to push outward rather than downward. The "flying" buttresses support the roof by pushing back inward. Gothic architects were masters at playing architectural forces against each other to build loftier and loftier churches, with walls opened up for stained-glass windows.



Picture Quasimodo limping around along the railed balcony at the base of the roof among the gargoyles. These grotesque beasts sticking out from pillars and buttresses represent souls caught between heaven and earth. They also function as rainspouts (from the same French root as “gargle”) when there are no evil spirits to battle.



The neo-Gothic 300-foot spire is a product of the 1860 reconstruction of the dilapidated old church. Victor Hugo’s book *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831) inspired a young architecture student named Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc to dedicate his career to a major renovation in Gothic style. Find Viollet-le-Duc himself at the base of the spire among the green apostles and evangelists (visible as you approach the back end of the church). The apostles look outward, blessing the city, while the architect (at top) looks up the spire, marveling at his fine work.

• *Behind Notre-Dame, cross the street and go through the accessible iron gate into the park at the tip of the island. Enjoy the sights from this little park. When you’re ready to leave the park, go out the same gate and proceed on the sidewalk left of the fence that defines the park. Follow this sidewalk to the corner and cross the street at the curb cut by the light. To reach our next stop, turn right and go past the steps to reach the accessible ramp just beyond.*

Deportation Memorial (Mémorial de la Déportation)

Access: AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. Use the accessible ramped entrance just past the steps. Once inside, the gardens are accessible, but the actual memorial chambers are not.

Cost and Hours: Free, daily April–Sept 10:00–12:00 & 14:00–19:00, Oct–March 10:00–12:00 & 14:00–17:00.

The Sight: This memorial to the 200,000 French victims of the Nazi concentration camps (1940–1945) draws you into their experience. France was quickly overrun by Nazi Germany, and Paris spent the war years under Nazi occupation. Jews and dissidents were rounded up and deported—many never returned.

As you enter, the city around you disappears. Surrounded by walls, you have become a prisoner. Your only freedom is your view of the sky and the tiny glimpse of the river below. Enter the dark, single-file chamber up ahead. Inside, the circular plaque in the floor reads, “They went to the end of the earth and did not return.”

The hallway stretching in front of you is lined with 200,000 lighted



crystals, one for each French citizen who died. Flickering at the far end is the eternal flame of hope. The tomb of the unknown deportee lies at your feet. Above, the inscription reads, “Dedicated to the living memory of the 200,000 French deportees sleeping in the night and the fog, exterminated in the Nazi concentration camps.”

The side rooms are filled with triangles—reminiscent of the identification patches inmates were forced to wear—each bearing the name of a concentration camp. Above the exit as you leave is the message you’ll find at all Nazi sites: “Forgive, but never forget.”

Ile St. Louis

Back on street level, look across the river to the Ile St. Louis. If the Ile de la Cité is a tug laden with the history of Paris, it’s towing this classy little residential dinghy laden only with high-rent apartments, boutiques, characteristic restaurants, and famous sorbet shops.

This island wasn’t developed until much later than the Ile de la Cité (17th century). What was a swampy mess is now harmonious Parisian architecture and one of Paris’ most exclusive neighborhoods. Its uppity residents complain that the local ice cream shop—Berthillon—draws crowds until late into the night (**AE+A, AI+A**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 4” entry doorstep and one interior 4” step; 31 rue St. Louis-en-l’Ile).

On the Left Bank (on your right), at the foot of the bridge across from Ile St. Louis, you’ll find one of Paris’ most exclusive restaurants, La Tour d’Argent. Because the top floor has floor-to-ceiling windows, your evening meal comes with glittering views—and a golden price (allow €200 minimum, though you get a free photo of yourself dining elegantly with Notre-Dame floodlit in the background).

• *To visit Ile St. Louis now, backtrack to the intersection and cross the little bridge. Otherwise, to continue to the Left Bank, cross the Pont Arch bridge from the tip of Ile de la Cité turn right. Proceed along the river, toward the front end of Notre-Dame. For those who are able, stairs detour down to the riverbank, a fine place to picnic. You can also reach this riverbank by ramp: If you look a half block upriver, you’ll see a long ramp that drops down to the riverbank... but beware of rising tides that can “dampen” your ability to get back on the ramp. This side view of the church from across the river is one of Europe’s great sights and best from river level.*

LEFT BANK

The Rive Gauche, or the Left Bank of the Seine—“left” if you were floating downstream—still has many of the twisting lanes and narrow buildings of medieval times. The Right Bank is more modern and business-oriented, with wide boulevards and stressed Parisians in suits. Here along the riverbank, the “big business” is secondhand books, displayed in the green metal stalls on the parapet. These literary entrepreneurs pride themselves on their easygoing business style. With flexible hours and virtually no overhead, they run their businesses as they



have since medieval times. For more information, see “*Les Bouquinistes* (Riverside Vendors)” sidebar.

• *Though this is an old neighborhood, they’ve done a fine job of updating it with curb cuts—so access should be straightforward. When you reach the bridge (pont au Double) that crosses over in front of Notre-Dame, veer to the left across the street to a small park (place Viviani; fill your water bottle from fountain on left). You’ll find the small rough-stone church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre just after the square and pass Paris’ oldest inhabitant—an acacia tree nicknamed Robinier, after the guy who planted it in 1602—that may once have shaded the Sun King.*

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Medieval Paris (1000–1400)

Picture Paris in 1250, when the church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre was still new. Notre-Dame was nearly done (so they thought), Sainte-Chapelle had just opened, the university was expanding human knowledge, and Paris was fast becoming a prosperous industrial and commercial center. The area around the church gives you some of the medieval feel. Looking along nearby rue Galande, you’ll see a few old houses leaning every which way. (La Guillotine Pub at #52 sports an authentic guillotine from 1792 on its wall.) In medieval days, people were piled on top of each other, building at all angles, as they scrambled for this prime real estate near the main commercial artery of the day—the Seine. The smell of fish competed with the smell of neighbors in this knot of humanity.

Narrow dirt (or mud) streets sloped from here down into the mucky Seine, until modern quays and embankments cleaned that up.

• *Return to the river and turn left on rue de la Bûcherie. At #37, drop into the...*

Les Bouquinistes (Riverside Vendors)

The used-book sellers (*bouquinistes*) you see along the Seine around Notre-Dame are a Parisian fixture. It seems they've been here forever—at least since the mid-1500s, when shops and stalls lined most of the bridges in Paris. In 1557, they were labeled as thieves for selling forbidden Protestant pamphlets during the Wars of Religion (Parisians were staunchly Catholic).

The term *bouquinistes* (boo-keen-eest) probably comes from the Dutch word *boeckin*, meaning “small book.” First using wheelbarrows to transport and sell their goods, these hardy entrepreneurs eventually fastened trays with thin leather straps to the parapets of the bridges. After the Revolution, business boomed when entire libraries were seized from nobles or clergymen and landed on the banks of the Seine. In 1891, *bouquinistes* received permission to permanently attach their boxes to the quaysides. Today, the waiting list is eight years long to become one of Paris' 250 *bouquinistes*.

Each *bouquiniste* is given four boxes (*boîtes*—each 6 feet long, 14 inches high, and 2.5 feet deep), and rent is paid only for the stone on which the boxes rest (less than €100 per year). The most coveted spots are awarded based on seniority. Maintenance costs, including the required *vert* wagon paint (the green color of old train cars), is paid by the *bouquinistes*. With little overhead, prices are usually cheaper than in most shops. While these days tourists buy magnets and coasters more than vintage books, officially the city allows no more than one box of souvenirs for every three boxes of books.

Bouquinistes must be open at least four days a week. Wednesdays are best (when school is out), and warm, dry days are golden (notice that every item is wrapped in protective plastic). And yes, they do leave everything inside when they lock up at night; metal bars and padlocks keep things safe.

Shakespeare and Company Bookstore

Access: AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible.

Cost and Hours: Free, daily 12:00–24:00.

The Sight: In addition to hosting butchers and fishmongers, the Left Bank has been home to scholars, philosophers, and poets since medieval times. This funky bookstore—a reincarnation of the original shop from the 1920s—has picked up the literary torch. Sylvia Beach, an American with a passion for free thinking, opened Shakespeare and

Company for the post-WWI Lost Generation, who came to Paris to find themselves. American writers flocked here for the cheap rent, fleeing the uptight, Prohibition-era United States. Beach's bookstore was famous as a meeting place of Paris' literary expatriate elite. Ernest Hemingway borrowed books from here regularly. James Joyce struggled to find a publisher for his now classic novel *Ulysses*—until Sylvia Beach published it. George Bernard Shaw, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound also got their English fix here.



Today, the bookstore carries on that literary tradition. Struggling writers are given free accommodations upstairs in tiny rooms with views of Notre-Dame. Downstairs, travelers enjoy a great selection of used English books. Pick up the *Paris Voice* newspaper and say hi to owner George (thriving at 90 years old) and his daughter...Sylvia.

Notice the green water fountain (1900) in front of the bookstore, one of the many in Paris donated by the English philanthropist Sir Richard Wallace. The hooks below the caryatids once held metal mugs for drinking the water.



• Continue to the rue du Petit-Pont (which becomes rue St. Jacques). This bustling north-south boulevard was the Romans' busiest boulevard 2,000 years ago, with chariots racing in and out of the city. (Roman-iacs can view remains from the 3rd-century baths, along with a fine medieval collection, at the nearby Cluny Museum, near the corner of boulevards St. Michel and St. Germain; Level 3—Minimally Accessible; for details, see page *TK.)

Moving away from the river for one block, turn right at the Gothic church of St. Séverin and enter the Latin Quarter.

St. Séverin

Don't ask me why, but it took a century longer to build this church than Notre-Dame. This is flamboyant, or "flame-like," Gothic, and you can see the short, prickly spires meant to make



this building flicker in the eyes of the faithful. The church gives us a close-up look at gargoyles. This weird, winged species of flying mammal, now extinct, used to swoop down on unwary peasants, occasionally carrying off small children in their beaks. Today, they're most impressive in thunderstorms, when they vomit rain.

• *At #22 rue St. Séverin, you'll find the skinniest house in Paris, two windows wide. Rue St. Séverin leads right through...*

The Latin Quarter

While it may look more like the Greek Quarter today (cheap gyros abound), this area is the Latin Quarter, named for the language you'd have heard on these streets if you were here in the Middle Ages. The University of Paris (founded 1215), one of the leading educational institutions of medieval Europe, was (and still is) nearby.

A thousand years ago, the “crude” or vernacular local languages were sophisticated enough to communicate basic human needs, but if you wanted to get philosophical, the language of choice was Latin. The class of educated elite of medieval Europe transcended nations and borders. From Sicily to Sweden, they spoke and corresponded in Latin. Now the most Latin thing about this area is the beat you may hear coming from some of the subterranean jazz clubs.

Along rue St. Séverin, you can still see the shadow of the medieval sewer system. The street slopes into a central channel of bricks. In the days before plumbing and toilets, when people still went to the river or neighborhood wells for their water, flushing meant throwing it out the window. At certain times of day, maids on the fourth floor would holler, “*Garde de l'eau!*” (“Watch out for the water!”) and heave it into the streets, where it would eventually wash down into the Seine.

As you wander, remember that before Napoleon III commissioned Baron Haussmann to modernize the city with grand boulevards (19th century), Paris was just like this—a medieval tangle. The ethnic feel of this area is nothing new—it's been a melting pot and university district for almost 800 years.

• *Keep wandering straight and you'll come to...*

Boulevard St. Michel

Busy boulevard St. Michel (or “boul' Miche”) is famous as the main artery for Paris' café and artsy scene, culminating a block away (to the left), where it intersects boulevard St. Germain. Although nowadays you're more likely to find pantyhose at 30 percent off, there are still many cafés, boutiques, and bohemian haunts nearby.

The Sorbonne—the University of Paris’ humanities department—is also close, if you want to make a detour, though entry is not allowed for visitors. (Turn left on boulevard St. Michel and go two blocks south. Gaze at the dome from the place de la Sorbonne courtyard. The buildings are off-limits to tourists). Originally founded as a theological school, the Sorbonne began attracting more students and famous professors—such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Peter Abélard—as its prestige grew. By the time the school expanded to include other subjects, it had a reputation for bold, new ideas. Nonconformity is a tradition here, and Paris remains a world center for new intellectual trends.

• *Cross boulevard St. Michel. Just ahead is...*

Place St. André-des-Arts

This tree-filled square is lined with cafés. In Paris, most serious thinking goes on in cafés. For centuries, these have been social watering holes, where you can get a warm place to sit and stimulating conversation for the price of a cup of coffee. Every great French writer—from Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Derrida—had a favorite haunt.

Paris honors its writers. If you visit the Panthéon—a few blocks up boulevard St. Michel and to the left—you will find French writers (Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Rousseau), inventors (Louis Braille), and scientists (including Marie and Pierre Curie) buried in a setting usually reserved for warriors and politicians. (Unfortunately, the Panthéon is Level 4—Not Accessible.)

• *Adjoining this square toward the river is the triangular place St. Michel, with a Métro stop and a statue of St. Michael killing a devil. Note: If you were to continue west along rue St. André-des-Arts, you’d find more Left Bank action.*

Place St. Michel

You’re in the traditional core of the Left Bank’s artsy, liberal, hippie, bohemian district of poets, philosophers, and winos. Nearby, you’ll find international eateries, far-out bookshops, street singers, pale girls in black berets, jazz clubs, and—these days—tourists. Small cinemas show avant-garde films, almost always in the *version originale* (v.o.). For colorful wandering and café-sitting, afternoons and evenings are best. In the morning, it feels sleepy. The Latin Quarter stays up late and sleeps in.

In less commercial times, place St. Michel was a gathering point for the city’s malcontents and misfits. In 1830, 1848, and again in 1871, the citizens took the streets from the government troops, set up barricades



Les Miz-style, and fought against royalist oppression. In World War II, the locals rose up against their Nazi oppressors (read the plaques under the dragons at the foot of the St. Michel fountain).

And in the spring of 1968, a time of social upheaval all over the world, young students battled riot batons and tear gas, took over the square, and declared it an independent state. Factory workers followed their call to arms and went on strike, toppling the de Gaulle government and forcing

change. Eventually, the students were pacified, the university was reformed, and the Latin Quarter's original cobblestones were replaced with pavement, so future scholars could never again use the streets as weapons.

• *From place St. Michel, look across the river and find the spire of the Sainte-Chapelle church, with its weathervane angel nearby. Cross the river on pont St. Michel and continue north along the boulevard du Palais. On your left, you'll see the doorway to the Sainte-Chapelle. You'll need to pass through a metal detector to get into the Sainte-Chapelle complex. This is more than a tourist attraction—you're entering the courtyard of France's Supreme Court (to the right of Sainte-Chapelle). Once past security, you'll find restrooms ahead on the left (these are not accessible, but there are wheelchair-accessible toilets near the Palace of Justice entrance, with one 4" curb to negotiate and a long ramp with no railing). The line into the church may be long (but with a Museum Pass, you can bypass this line.)*

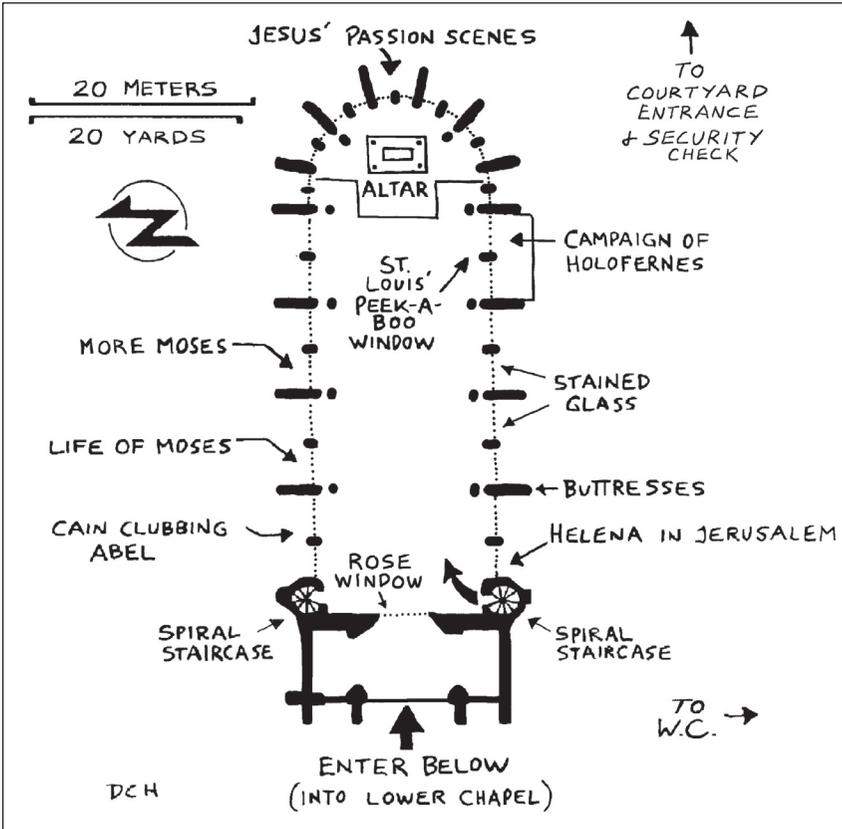
After going through the security area and the cobblestone pathway, find the wheelchair-accessible entryway ramp (listed as the exit). Enter the humble ground floor of...

SAINTE-CHAPELLE

Access: Ground floor only—AE, AI, AT+A, Level 2—Moderately Accessible. Unfortunately, the upstairs chapel can be reached only by climbing a narrow spiral staircase (Level 4—Not accessible, though slow walkers will find it's worth the climb).

Cost and Hours: Free for wheelchair users, otherwise €7, €10.50 combo-ticket also includes Conciergerie, covered by Museum Pass, open

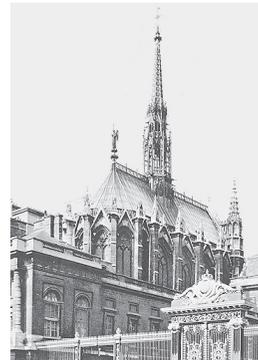
Sainte-Chapelle



March–Oct daily 9:30–18:00, Nov–Feb daily 9:00–17:00, last entry 30 min before closing.

The Sight: Sainte-Chapelle, the triumph of Gothic church architecture, is a cathedral of glass like no other. It was built in 1248 for King Louis IX (the only French king who is now a saint) to house the supposed Crown of Thorns. Its architectural harmony is due to the fact that it was completed under the direction of one architect and in only five years—unheard of in Gothic times. Recall that Notre-Dame took over 200 years.

While the inside is beautiful, the exterior is basically structural. The muscular buttresses hold up the stone roof, so that the walls are essentially for stained glass. The lacy spire is



neo-Gothic—added in the 19th century. Inside, the layout clearly shows an *ancien régime* approach to worship. The low-ceilinged basement was for staff and more common folks—worshipping under a sky filled with painted fleurs-de-lis, a symbol of the king. Royal Christians worshipped upstairs. The paint job, a 19th-century restoration, helps you imagine how grand this small, painted, jeweled chapel was. (Imagine Notre-Dame painted like this....) Each capital is playfully carved with a different plant's leaves.

• *If you are able, climb the spiral staircase to the Haute Chapelle. Leave the rough stone of the earth and move into the light.*

The Stained Glass

Fiat lux. “Let there be light.” From the first page of the Bible, it’s clear—light is divine. Light shines through stained glass like God’s grace shining down to earth, and Gothic architects used their new technology to turn dark stone buildings into lanterns of light. For me, the glory of Gothic shines brighter here than in any other church.

There are 15 separate panels of stained glass, with more than 1,100 different scenes, mostly from the Bible. These cover the entire Christian history of the world, from the Creation in Genesis (first window on the left, as you face the altar), to the coming of Christ (over the altar), to the end of the world (the round, “rose”-shaped window at the rear of the church). Each individual scene is interesting, and the whole effect is overwhelming. Allow yourself a few minutes to bask in the glow of the colored light before tackling the window descriptions below, then remember to keep referring to the map to find the windows.



• *Working clockwise from the entrance, here are some scenes worth a look. (Note: The sun lights up different windows at different times of day. Overcast days give the most even light. On bright, sunny days, some sections are glorious, while others look like a sheet of lead.)*

Genesis—Cain Clubbing Abel (first window on the left—always dark because of a building butted up against it): On the bottom level in the third circle from left, we see God create the round earth and hold it up. On the next level up, we catch glimpses of naked Adam and Eve. On the third level (far right circle), Cain, in red, clubs his brother Abel, creating murder.

Life of Moses (second window, the bottom row of diamond panels):

Stained Glass Supreme

Craftsmen made glass—which is, essentially, melted sand—using this recipe:

- Melt one part sand with two parts wood ash.
- Mix in rusty metals to get different colors—iron makes red, cobalt makes blue, copper green, manganese purple, cadmium yellow.
- Blow glass into a cylinder shape, cut lengthwise, and lay flat.
- Cut into pieces with an iron tool, or by heating and cooling a select spot to make it crack.
- Fit pieces together to form a figure, using strips of lead to hold in place.
- Place masterpiece so high on a wall that no one can read it.

The first panel shows baby Moses in a basket, placed by his sister in the squiggly brown river. Next, he's found by the pharaoh's daughter. Then, he grows up. And finally, he's a man, a prince of Egypt on his royal throne.

More Moses (third window, in middle and upper sections): You'll see various scenes of Moses, the guy with the bright yellow horns—the result of a medieval mistranslation of the Hebrew word for “rays of light,” or halo.

Jesus' Passion Scenes (over the altar): These scenes from Jesus' arrest and crucifixion were the backdrop for the Crown of Thorns, which originally was displayed on the altar. Position yourself a few feet back from the altar to look through the canopy to find Jesus in yellow shorts, carrying his cross (5th frame up from right bottom). A little below that, see Jesus being whipped (left) and—the key scene in this relic chapel—Jesus in purple, being fitted with the painful Crown of Thorns (right). Finally (as high as you can see), Jesus on the cross is speared by a soldier (trust me).



Campaign of Holofernes: On the bottom row are four scenes of colorful knights (refer to map to get reoriented). The second circle from the left is a battle scene (the campaign of Holofernes), showing three soldiers with swords slaughtering three men. The background is blue. The men have different-colored clothes—red, blue, green, mauve, and white. Notice some of the details. You can see the folds in the robes,

the hair, and facial features. Look at the victim in the center—his head is splotted with blood. Details like the folds in the robes (see the victim in white, lower left) came either by scratching on the glass or by baking on paint. It was a painstaking process of finding just the right colors, fitting them together to make a scene...and then multiplying by 1,100.

Helena in Jerusalem (first window on the right wall by entrance): This window tells the story of how Christ's Crown of Thorns found its way from Jerusalem to Constantinople to this chapel. Start in the lower left corner, where the Roman emperor Constantine (in blue, on his throne) waves goodbye to his Christian mom, Helena. She arrives at the gate of Jerusalem (next panel to the right). Her men (in the two-part medallion above Jerusalem) dig through ruins and find Christ's (tiny) cross and other relics. She returns to Constantinople with a stash of holy relics, including the Crown of Thorns. Nine hundred years later, French Crusader knights (the next double medallion above) invade the Holy Land and visit Constantinople. Finally, King Louis IX, dressed in blue (in the panel up one and to the right of the last one) returns to France with the sacred relic.

Rose Window (above entrance): It's Judgment Day, with a tiny Christ in the center of the chaos and miracles. This window is 200 years newer than the rest, from the Flamboyant period. Facing west and the sunset, it's best late in the day.

If you can't read much into the individual windows, you're not alone. (For some tutoring, a little book with color photos is on sale downstairs with the postcards.)

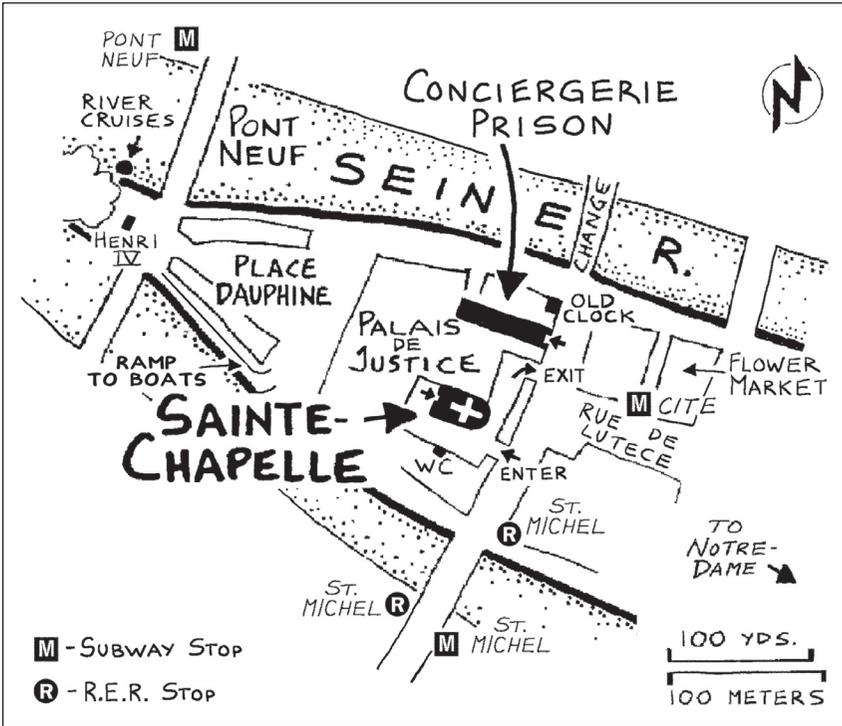
Altar

The altar was raised up high to better display the relic around which this chapel was built—the Crown of Thorns. This was the crown put on Jesus when the Romans were torturing and humiliating him before his execution. Notice the staircase: Access was limited to the priest and the king, who wore the keys to the shrine around his neck. Also see that there is no high profile image of Jesus anywhere—this chapel was all about the Crown.



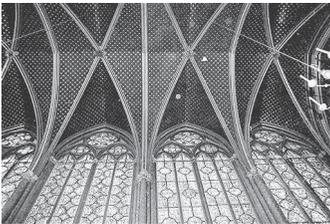
King Louis IX, convinced he'd found the real McCoy, paid £135,000 for the Crown, £100,000 for the gem-studded shrine to display it in (destroyed in the French Revolution), and a mere £40,000 to build Sainte-Chapelle to house it. Today, the supposed Crown of Thorns is kept in the Notre-Dame Treasury (and shown only on the 1st Friday of the

Sainte-Chapelle Area



month and during Easter).

Lay your camera on the ground and shoot the ceiling. Those pure and simple ribs growing out of the slender columns are the essence of Gothic structure.



• *Exit Sainte-Chapelle.* Back outside, as you go around the church exterior, look down to see the foundation and notice how much Paris has risen in the 750 years since the Sainte-Chapelle was built. Next door to Sainte-Chapelle is the...

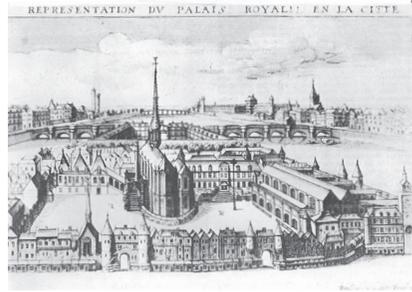
Palais de Justice

You're in a huge complex of buildings that has housed the local government since ancient Roman times. It was the site of the original Gothic palace of the early kings of France. The only surviving medieval parts are Sainte-Chapelle and the Conciergerie prison.

Most of the site is now covered by the giant Palais de Justice, built in 1776, home of the French Supreme Court. The motto *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* over the doors is a reminder that this was also the headquarters

of the Revolutionary government. Here, they doled out justice, condemning many to imprisonment in the Conciergerie downstairs or to the guillotine.

• *Now pass through the big iron gate to the noisy boulevard du Palais. Cross the street to the wide pedestrian-only rue de Lutèce and go about halfway down.*



Cité “Metropolitain” Stop

Of the 141 original, early-20th-century subway entrances, this is one of only a few survivors—now preserved as a national art treasure. (New York’s Museum of Modern Art even exhibits one.) It marks Paris at its peak in 1900—on the cutting edge of modernism, but with an eye to beauty. The curvy, plantlike ironwork is a textbook example of Art Nouveau, the style that rebelled against the erector-set squareness of the Industrial Age. In Paris, only the stations at Abbesses and Porte Dauphine survive with their canopies.



The flower and plant market on place Louis Lépine is a pleasant detour. On Sundays, this square is all aflutter with a busy bird market. And across the way is the Prefecture de Police, where Inspector Clouseau of *Pink Panther* fame used to work, and where the local resistance fighters took the first building from the Nazis in August of 1944, leading to the Allied liberation of Paris a week later.

• *Pause here to admire the view. Sainte-Chapelle is a pearl in an ugly architectural oyster. Double back to the Palais de Justice, turn right and—if you are able—enter the Conciergerie (entrance on boulevard du Palais). Though pretty barren inside, the Conciergerie echoes with history and is free with the Museum Pass. If you are unable to enter the Conciergerie, simply skip down to “Place Dauphine,” below*

Conciergerie

Access: Level 4—Not Accessible. Visitors must negotiate a flight of stairs to get into the courtyard and lobby of the Conciergerie.

Cost and Hours: €7, €10.50 combo-ticket with Sainte-Chapelle,

covered by Museum Pass, April–Sept daily 9:30–18:00, Oct–March daily 10:00–17:00, last entry 30 min before closing.

The Sight: Positioned next to the courthouse, the Conciergerie was the gloomy prison famous as the last stop for 2,780 victims of the guillotine, including France’s last Old Regime queen, Marie-Antoinette. Before then, kings had used the building to torture and execute failed assassins. (One of its towers along the river was called “the babbler,” named for the pain-induced sounds that leaked from it.) When the Revolution (1789) toppled the king, the building kept its same function, but without torture. The progressive Revolutionaries proudly unveiled a modern and more humane way to execute people—the guillotine.

Inside, pick up a free map and breeze through. See the spacious, low-ceilinged Hall of Men-at-Arms (Room 2), with four large fireplaces, used as a guard room. This big room gives a feel for the grandeur of the Great Hall (upstairs, not open to visitors) where the Revolutionary tribunals grilled scared prisoners on their political correctness. The raised area at the far end of the room (Room 4, today’s bookstore) was notorious as the walkway of the executioner, who was known affectionately as “Monsieur de Paris.”

Upstairs is the Prisoners’ Gallery, a hall where the condemned milled about, waiting for the open-air cart (tumbrel) to pull up outside to carry them to the guillotine on place de la Concorde. Some reconstructed cells show how the poor slept on straw, while the wealthy got a cot.

Up a few more steps is a memorial room with the names of the 2,780 citizens condemned to death by the guillotine. In alphabetical order, find: Georges Danton (prominent revolutionary who was later condemned for being insufficiently liberal, a nasty crime), Charlotte Corday



and stabbed him while he bathed), Anne-Elizabeth Capet (whose crime was being “sister of the tyrant”), Louis XVI (“called Capet: last king of France”), Marie-Antoinette, and—oh the irony—Maximilien de Robespierre, the head of the Revolution, the man who sent so many to the guillotine, and who was eventually toppled, humiliated, imprisoned here, and beheaded.

Back downstairs, arrows lead through a small museum (with a guillotine blade) to a chapel that was the actual cell of Marie-Antoinette. The chapel was made by Louis

XVIII, the brother of beheaded Louis XVI and the first king back on the throne after the restoration (in 1815, once Napoleon was booted). The paintings show Marie-Antoinette in her cell and receiving the Last Sacrament on the night before her beheading. The walls drip with silver embroidered tears.

The tour continues outside in the courtyard, where women prisoners were allowed a little fresh air (notice the original spikes still guarding from above). In the corner a door leads to a re-creation of Marie-Antoinette's Cell (Room 12). Imagine the Queen spending her last days—separated from her 10-year-old son, and now widowed because the King had already been executed. Mannequins, period furniture, and the real cell wallpaper set the scene. The guard stands modestly behind a screen while the queen psyches herself up with a crucifix. In the glass display case, see her actual crucifix, napkin, and small water pitcher. On October 16, 1793, the queen walked the corridor, stepped onto the cart, and was slowly carried to place de la Concorde, where she had a date with “Monsieur de Paris.” A video in the next room gives a taste of prison life during the Reign of Terror.

- *Back outside, turn left on boulevard du Palais and head toward the river (north). On the corner is the city's oldest public clock. The mechanism of the present clock is from 1334, and even though the case is Baroque, it keeps on ticking.*

Turn left onto quai de l'Horloge and continue west along the river, past the round medieval tower called “the babbler.” The bridge up ahead is the pont Neuf, where we'll end this tour. At the first corner, veer left into a sleepy triangular square called...

Place Dauphine

It's amazing to find such coziness in the heart of Paris. This city of two million is still a city of neighborhoods, a collection of villages. The French Supreme Court building looms behind like a giant marble gavel. Enjoy the village-Paris feeling in the park. You may see lawyers on their lunch break playing *boules* (see sidebar on page *TK).

- *Continue through place Dauphine. As you pop out the other end, you're face to face with a...*

Statue of Henry IV

Henry IV (1553–1610) is not as famous as his grandson, Louis XIV, but Henry helped make Paris what it is today—a European capital of elegant buildings and quiet squares. He built the place Dauphine (behind you), the pont Neuf (to the right), residences (to the left, down rue Dauphine), the Louvre's long Grand Gallery (downriver on the right), and the tree-filled

square Vert-Galant (directly behind the statue, on the tip of the island). The square is one of Paris' makeout spots; its name comes from Henry's own nickname, the Green Knight, as Henry was a notorious ladies' man. The park is a great place to relax, looking out over the concrete prow of this boat-shaped island.

- *From the statue, turn right onto the old bridge. Pause at the little nook half-way across.*

Pont Neuf

The pont Neuf, or “new bridge,” is Paris' oldest standing bridge (built 1578–1607). Its 12 arches span the widest part of the river. Unlike other bridges, this one never had houses or buildings growing on it. The turrets were originally for vendors and street entertainers. In the days of Henry IV, who promised his peasants “a chicken in every pot every Sunday,” this would have been a lively scene. From the bridge, look downstream (west) to see the next bridge, the pedestrian-only pont des Arts. Ahead on the Right Bank is the long Louvre Museum. Beyond that, on the Left Bank is the Orsay. And what's that tall black tower in the distance?

The Seine

Our tour ends where Paris began—on the Seine River. From Dijon to the English Channel, the Seine meanders 500 miles, cutting through the center of Paris. The river is shallow and slow within the city, but still dangerous enough to require steep stone embankments (built 1910) to prevent occasional floods.

In summer, the roads that run along the river are replaced with acres of sand, as well as beach chairs and tanned locals, creating a beach called Paris Plage. The success of the Paris Plage event has motivated some city officials to propose the permanent removal of vehicles from those fast lanes—turning this into riverside parks instead.

Any time of year, you'll see tourist boats and the commercial barges that carry 20 percent of Paris' transported goods. And on the banks, sportsmen today cast into the waters once fished by Paris' original Celtic inhabitants.

- *We're done. You can take a boat tour that leaves from near the base of pont Neuf on the island side (Vedettes du Pont Neuf, AE, AI, Level 1—Fully Accessible; €10, tip requested, departs hourly on the hour, 2/hr after dark, has live guide with explanations in French and English). To reach the boats via an accessible ramp, traverse some cobblestones one block upriver (east) of the bridge on the south side of the island. The ramp will lead you along the riverfront and under the Pont Neuf to the boat dock.*