



CHAMPS-ELYSEES ROLL OR STROLL

From the Arc de Triomphe to the Tuileries Gardens

Don't leave Paris without experiencing the avenue des Champs-Élysées (shahnz ay-lee-zay). This is Paris at its most Parisian: monumental sidewalks, stylish shops, grand cafés, and glimmering showrooms. This tour covers about three miles. If that seems like too much for you, break it down into several different outings (taxis roll down the Champs-Élysées frequently and Métro stops are located every 3 blocks). Take your time and enjoy. It's a great roll or stroll day or night.

The tour begins at the top of the Champs-Élysées, across a huge traffic circle from the famous Arc de Triomphe. Note that getting to the arch itself, and access within the arch, are extremely challenging for travelers with limited mobility. I suggest simply viewing the arch from across the street (described below).

If you are able, and you wish to visit the arch, here's the information: The arch is connected to the top of the Champs-Élysées via an underground walkway (twenty-five 6" steps down and thirty 6" steps back up). To reach this passageway, take the Métro to the not-accessible Charles de Gaulle Etoile station and follow *sortie #1, Champs-Élysées/Arc de Triomphe* signs. You can take an elevator only partway up the inside of the arch, to a museum with some city views. To reach the best views at the very top, you must climb the last 46 stairs. For more, see the listing on page *TK.

THE TOUR BEGINS

The Arc de Triomphe

• View this famous Paris landmark from the top of the Champs-Élysées.

Construction on this 165-foot-high arch was begun in 1809 to honor Napoleon's soldiers, who, in spite of being vastly outnumbered by the Austrians, scored a remarkable victory at the battle of Austerlitz. Patterned after the ceremonial arches of ancient Roman conquerors (but more than twice the size), it celebrates Napoleon as emperor of a "New Rome." On the arch's massive left pillar, a relief sculpture shows a toga-clad Napoleon posing confidently, while an awestruck Paris—crowned by her city walls—kneels at his imperial feet. Napoleon died prior to the Arc's completion, but it was finished in time for his 1840 funeral procession to pass underneath, carrying his remains (19 years dead) from exile in St. Helena to Paris.



On the right pillar is the Arc's most famous relief, *La Marseillaise* (*Le Départ des Volontaires de 1792*, by François Rude). Lady Liberty—looking like an ugly reincarnation of Joan of Arc—screams, "Freedom is this way!" and points the direction with a sword. The soldiers below her are tired, naked, and stumbling, but she rallies them to carry on the fight against oppression.

Today, the Arc de Triomphe is dedicated to the glory of all French armies. Directly under the arch are lists of French victories since the Revolution—19th century on the arch, 20th century in the pavement. On the columns are lists of generals (with a line under the names of those who died in battle). Nearby is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (from World War I). Every day at 18:30 since just after World War I, the flame has been rekindled and new flowers set in place.

Like its Roman ancestors, this arch has served as a parade gateway for triumphal armies (French or foe) and important ceremonies. From 1940 to 1944, a large swastika flew from



here as Nazis goose-stepped down the Champs-Élysées. In August 1944, Charles de Gaulle led Allied troops under this arch as they celebrated liberation. Today, national parades start and end here with one minute of silence.

- *Surrounding the arch is a swirling...*

Traffic Circle

The 12 boulevards that radiate from the Arc de Triomphe (forming an *étoile*, or star) were part of Baron Haussmann's master plan for Paris: the creation of a series of major boulevards, intersecting at diagonals with monuments (such as the Arc de Triomphe) as centerpieces of those intersections.

His plan did not anticipate the automobile—obvious when you watch the traffic scene. But see how smoothly it really functions. Cars entering the circle have the right of way (the only roundabout in France with this rule); those in the circle must yield. Still, there are plenty of accidents, often caused by tourists oblivious to the rules. Tired of disputes, insurance companies split the fault and damages of any Arc de Triomphe accident 50/50. The trick is to make a parabola—get to the center ASAP, and then begin working your way out two avenues before you want to exit.

- *We'll start our tour down the Champs-Élysées at the Charles de Gaulle-Etoile Métro stop, on the north (sunnier) side of the street. Look straight down the Champs-Élysées to the Tuileries Garden at the far end.*

The Champs-Élysées

You're at the top of one of the world's grandest and most celebrated streets, home to big business, celebrity cafés, glitzy nightclubs, high-fashion shopping, and international people-watching.

In 1667, Louis XIV opened the first section of the street as a short extension of the Tuileries Garden. This date is considered the birth of Paris as a grand city. The Champs-Élysées soon became *the* place to cruise in your carriage. (It still is today—traffic can be jammed up even at midnight.) One hundred years later, the café scene arrived.

From the 1920s until the 1960s, this boulevard was pure elegance. Parisians actually dressed up to come here. It was mainly residences, rich hotels, and cafés. Then, in 1963, the government pumped up the neighborhood's commercial metabolism by bringing in the RER (commuter train). Suburbanites had easy access, and bam—there went the neighborhood.

• *Start your descent, pausing at the first tiny street you cross, rue de Tilsitt. This street is part of a shadow ring road—an option for drivers who'd like to avoid the chaos of the arch, complete with stoplights.*

A half-block down rue de Tilsitt is the Dresdner Bank building's entry (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 2" entry step). It's one of the few survivors of a dozen uniformly U-shaped buildings in Haussman's original 1853 grand design. Peek into the foyer for a glimpse of 19th-century Champs-Élysées classiness.

Back on the main drag, look across to the other side of the Champs-Élysées at the big, gray, concrete-and-glass "Publicis" building. Ugh. In the 1960s, venerable old buildings (similar to the Dresdner Bank building) were leveled to make way for new commercial operations like Publicis. Then, in 1985, a law prohibited the demolition of the old building fronts that gave the boulevard a uniform grace. Today, many modern businesses hide behind preserved facades.

The coming of McDonald's—farther down on the left at #140 (AE, AI, AT, Level 1—Fully Accessible)—was a shock to the boulevard. At first, it was only allowed to have white arches painted on the window. Today, it spills out legally onto the sidewalk—provided it offers café-quality chairs and flower boxes—and dining *chez MacDo* has become typically Parisian. A €3 Big Mac here buys an hour of people-watching. (There's an adapted toilet inside).

The *nouveau* Champs-Élysées, revitalized in 1994, has new benches and lamps, broader sidewalks, and a fleet of green-suited workers armed with high-tech pooper-scoopers. Blink away the modern elements, and it's not hard to imagine the boulevard pre-1963, with only the finest structures lining both sides all the way to the palace gardens.

Glitz

Fancy car dealerships include Peugeot, at #136 (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, three 6" entry steps; showing off its futuristic concept cars next to the classic models), and Mercedes-Benz, a block down at #118 (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 8" entry step). In the 19th century, this was an area for horse stables; today, it's the district of garages, limo companies, and car dealerships. If you're serious about selling cars in France, you must have a showroom on the Champs-Élysées.

Next to Mercedes is the famous Lido, Paris' largest cabaret (and a multiplex cinema). Go inside, if you are able (AE+A, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, two 6" entry steps). Check out the perky photos, R-rated videos, and shocking prices. Paris still offers the kind

of burlesque-type spectacles combining music, comedy, and scantily clad women performed here since the 19th century. Moviegoing on the Champs-Elysées is also popular, with theaters showing the very latest releases. Check to see if there are films you recognize, then look for the showings (*séances*). A “v.o.” (*version originale*) next to the time indicates the film will be in its original language.

- *Now cross the boulevard. Look up at the Arc de Triomphe with its rooftop bristling with tourists. Notice the architecture—old and elegant, new, and new-behind-old facades.*

Café Culture

Fouquet’s café-restaurant (**AE+A, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 3” entry step), under the red awning at #99, is a popular spot among French celebrities, serving the most expensive shot of espresso I’ve found in downtown Paris (€4.80). Opened in 1899 as a coachman’s bistro, Fouquet’s gained fame as the hangout of France’s WWI biplane fighter pilots—those who weren’t shot down by Germany’s infamous “Red Baron.” It also served as James Joyce’s dining room. Since the early 1900s, Fouquet’s has been a favorite of French actors and actresses. The golden plaques by the entrance honor winners of France’s Oscar-like film awards, the Césars—see plaques for Gérard Depardieu, Catherine Deneuve, Roman Polanski, Juliette Binoche, and many famous Americans (but not Jerry Lewis). Recent winners are posted inside. While the hushed interior is at once classy and intimidating, it’s a grand experience if you dare (the outdoor setting is also great, and more relaxed). Fouquet’s was recently saved from foreign purchase and eventual destruction when the government declared it a historic monument.

Ladurée (**AE, AI, AL**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, accessible entry on left side; 2 blocks downhill at #75, with green-and-purple awning) is a classic 19th-century tea salon/restaurant/*pâtisserie*. Its interior is right out of the 1860s. Wander in...you can even peek into the cozy rooms on the upper level. A coffee here is *très élégant* (only €3.30). The bakery sells traditional macaroons, cute little cakes, and gift-wrapped finger sandwiches to go (your choice of 4 mini-macaroons for €6).

- *Cross back to the lively (north) side of the street.*

At #92 (opposite Ladurée), a wall plaque marks the place Thomas Jefferson lived (with his 14-year-old slave, Sally Hemings) while minister to France (1785–1789). He replaced the popular Benjamin Franklin, but quickly made his own mark, extolling the virtues of America’s Revolution to a country approaching its own.

Club Med (#88), with its travel ads to sunny destinations, is a reminder of the French commitment to the vacation. Since 1936, the French, by law, have enjoyed five weeks of paid vacation (and every Catholic holiday invented). In the swinging '60s, Club Med made hedonism accessible to the middle-class French masses.

French Shopping

Go into the Arcades des Champs-Élysées mall (**AE, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; it's at #76—don't confuse it with the unappealing Galerie des Champs-Élysées, next door to Club Med). With its fancy lamps, mosaic floors, glass skylight, and classical columns, it captures faint echoes of the *années folles*—the “crazy years,” as the roaring '20s were called in France. Architecture buffs can observe how flowery Art Nouveau became simpler, more geometrical Art Deco. Down the street at #74, Galerie du Claridge (**AE, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible) is a fine example of an old facade—with an ironwork awning, balconies, *putti*, and sculpted fantasy faces—fronting a new building.

Take your nose sightseeing at #72; glide down Sephora's ramp into a vast hall of cosmetics and perfumes (**AE, AI, AL**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, elevator to left of entry; Mon–Sat 10:00–24:00, Sun 11:00–24:00). Grab a disposable white strip from a lovely clerk, spritz it with a sample, and sniff. The store is thoughtfully laid out: The entry hall (on the right) is lined with the new products—all open and ready (with sniff strips) to sample. In the main showroom, women's perfumes line the right wall and men's line the left wall—organized alphabetically by company, from Armani to Versace. The mesmerizing music, carefully chosen just for Sephora, actually made me crave cosmetics. At the rear of the store, you can have your face made over and your nails fixed like new. You can also get the advice of a “skin consultant.”

At the corner of rue la Boétie, the English pharmacy (**AE+A, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 3" entry step) is open until midnight, and map-lovers can detour one block down this street to shop at Espace IGN (Institut Géographique National; **AE, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible), France's version of the National Geographic Society.

International Shopping

A block farther down at #54, the Virgin Megastore (**AE+A, AI**, Level 2—Moderately Accessible, one 5" entry step) sells a world of music. Nearby, the Disney, Gap, and Quiksilver stores are reminders of global economics—the French seem to love these places as much as Americans do.

Rond-Point and Beyond

At the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées, the shopping ends and the fully accessible park begins. This round, leafy traffic circle is always colorful, lined with flowers or seasonal decorations (thousands of pumpkins at Halloween, hundreds of decorated trees at Christmas).

A long block past the Rond-Point, at Avenue de Marigny, look to the other side of the Champs-Élysées to find a new statue of Charles de Gaulle—ramrod straight and striding out as he did the day Paris was liberated in 1944. Charles stands in front of the glass-and-steel-domed Grand and Petit Palais exhibition halls (AE, AI, Level 2—Moderately Accessible; entrances accessible, ticket agent can assist), built for the 1900 World’s Fair. Today, these examples of the “can-do” spirit of the early 20th century are museums. Impressive temporary exhibits fill the huge Grand Palais (on right, €10.50, €9 after 13:00, not covered by Museum Pass; get details on current exhibitions from TIs or in *Pariscope*). The Petit Palais (left side; AE, AI, AT, Level 1—Fully Accessible), recently reopened after a long renovation, houses a permanent collection of 19th-century paintings by Eugène Delacroix, Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and other masters.

Beyond the two palaces, the pont Alexandre III leads over the Seine to the golden dome of Les Invalides. This exquisite bridge, spiked with golden statues and ironwork lamps, was built to celebrate a turn-of-the-20th-century treaty between France and Russia. Like the Grand and Petit Palais, it’s a fine example of belle époque exuberance.

Les Invalides was built by Louis XIV as a veterans’ hospital for his battle-weary troops (see page *TK). The esplanade leading up to Les Invalides—possibly the largest patch of grass in Paris—gives soccer balls and Frisbees a rare-in-Paris welcome.

Return to the sunny side of the street. From here, it’s a straight shot down the last stretch of the Champs-Élysées. The plane trees (a kind of sycamore with peeling bark that does well in big-city pollution) are reminiscent of the big push Napoleon III made, planting 600,000 trees to green up the city.

• *View the 21-acre place de la Concorde from the obelisk in the center.*

Place de la Concorde

During the Revolution, this was the place de la Révolution. Many of the 2,780 beheaded during the Revolution lost their bodies here during the Reign of Terror. The guillotine sat on this square. A bronze plaque in the ground in front of the obelisk memorializes the place where Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, Georges Danton, Charlotte Corday, and Maximilien

de Robespierre, among many others, were made “a foot shorter on top.” Three people worked the guillotine: One managed the blade, one held the blood bucket, and one caught the head, raising it high to the roaring crowd.

The 3,300-year-old, 72-foot, 220-ton, red granite, hieroglyph-inscribed obelisk of Luxor now forms the centerpiece of place de la Concorde. Here—on the spot where Louis XVI was beheaded—his brother (Charles X) honored the executed with this obelisk. (Charles became king when the monarchy was restored after Napoleon.) It was carted here from Egypt in the 1830s. The gold pictures on the pedestal tell the story of its incredible two-year journey: Pulled down from the entrance to Ramses II's Temple of Amon in Luxor; encased in wood; loaded onto a boat built to navigate both shallow rivers and open seas; floated down the Nile, across the Mediterranean, along the Atlantic coast, and up the Seine; and unloaded here, where it was reerected in 1836. Its glittering gold-leaf cap is a recent addition (1998), replacing the original stolen 2,500 years ago.



The obelisk also forms a center point along a line locals call the “royal perspective.” You can hang a lot of history along this straight line (Louvre—obelisk—Arc de Triomphe—Grande Arche de la Défense). The Louvre symbolizes the old regime (divine right rule by kings and queens). The obelisk and place de la Concorde symbolize the people’s revolution (cutting off the king’s head). The Arc de Triomphe calls to mind the triumph of nationalism (victorious armies carrying national flags under the arch). And the huge modern arch in the distance, surrounded by the headquarters of multinational corporations, heralds a future in which business entities are more powerful than nations.

Across the river (south) stands the building where the French National Assembly meets (similar to our Congress). On the north side of place de la Concorde is Hôtel Crillon, Paris’ most exclusive hotel. It’s the left one of two twin buildings that guard the entrance to rue Royale (which leads to the Greek-style Church of the Madeleine). This hotel is so fancy that one of its belle époque rooms is displayed in New York’s Metropolitan museum. Eleven years before the king lost his head on this square, Louis XVI met with Benjamin Franklin in this hotel to sign a treaty recognizing the United States as an independent country. (Today’s low-profile, heavily fortified American Embassy is located next door.)

For a memorable splurge, consider high tea at the accessible Crillon.

And from the base of the Champs-Élysées, the beautiful Tuileries Garden leads through the iron gates to the Louvre (with a non-accessible public WC just inside on the right). Relax next to the pond, or find one of the cafés in the gardens.

Nearby

Your guided tour is over. From here, you can go: to the closest Métro stop (Concorde), north to a fancy shopping area (near place de la Madeleine), into the park toward the Louvre, or across the river toward the Orsay Museum (read on).

If you go to the river, you'll cross a freeway underpass similar to the one at the pont de l'Alma, three bridges downstream, where Princess Diana lost her life in a 1997 car accident. The pont de la Concorde, built of stones from the Bastille prison (which was demolished by the Revolution in 1789), symbolizes that, with good government, *concorde* (harmony) can come from chaos. Position yourself mid-bridge and gaze upriver (east). If you use a clock as a compass, the Impressionist art museum L'Orangerie hides behind the trees at 10 o'clock, and the tall building with the skinny chimneys at 11 o'clock is the architectural caboose of the sprawling Louvre palace. The thin spire of Sainte-Chapelle is dead center at 12 o'clock, with the twin towers of Notre-Dame to its right. The Orsay Museum is closer on the right, connected with the Tuileries Garden by a sleek pedestrian bridge (the next bridge upriver).