

FRENCH KISS

Paris is arguably one of the world's most romantic cities – a majestic metropolis of pleasurable, indulgent externals – from the heady aroma of just-baked baguettes which when slathered with sweet French butter is nothing short of bliss and languid sexy sails along the Seine to impossible-to-resist walks along the narrow walkways under ancient arches in the oldest square in Paris – Place des Vosges.

There's an amazing array of hotel choices that range from right bank opulent to left bank hipster hideaway. Consider it a *grande affaire* if you decide on the Plaza Atheneé on Avenue Montaigne. *Sex and the City's* Carrie Bradshaw's temporary swank Paris digs – a reservation will get you a seriously gorgeous room dressed in velvets, damasks, and Porthault sheets and post-sightseeing, pastry-rich repasts are de rigueur in their Galerie des Gobelins. For couples looking to channel their inner French chef, Sofitel Demure's eight hotels are just the ticket (the Arc de Triomphe has canopy beds and elegant Le Faubourg has the most divine location). Their Gourmet Package includes hands-on French cooking lessons at the Lenôtre Cooking School, a lunch or dinner at any one of their *gastronomic* restaurants (Il Cortile, Le Clovis, Les Muses and La Table de Baltimore are all rated one-Michelin star), daily continental breakfast and special VIP amenities. For honeymooners in an artistic state of mind, the Hotel de Louvre off the Rue de Rivoli is a perfect choice – given that it's a stone's throw from the great museum's front doors. Many of the Belle Époque-style guestrooms offer kiss-inspiring views of the City of Light's best sights and the bathrooms are stocked with Annick Goutal goodies. Their Louvre Champagne Package translates to breakfast in bed or downstairs in the brasserie each morning, an icy-cold bottle of Taittinger Champagne to toast your new life and a free pass *pour deux* to the Louvre Museum. For history buffs yearning for Paris past – make a reservation at the charming albeit pricey Hotel Relais Christine. In the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés on the Left Bank – this romance-inspiring 16th century mansion is chock full of vaulted stone ceilings, antique furniture and yummy croissants and café au lait each morning in the blissfully private garden or in the Breakfast Room that was once an old chapel. Thrifty-minded honeymooners should look no further than the chi-chi and smartly decorated Hotel Bon Ami. Just steps from two of Paris's most famous cafes – Café Flore and Deux Magots – sign up for the Loves Me-Loves Me Not Package

which includes fresh colorful flowers, chilled champagne, daily buffet breakfasts and special VIP amenities. The lobby-level fireplace lounge is perfect for curling up for cocktails before heading out for dinner.

Since walking is the transportation of choice in Paris, take hand-holding strolls near Saint Germain-des-Prés and explore the enchanting streets, through old squares and artists' studios that surround it. Head up to the little 16th century village of Montemarte and the old cobblestone streets where Renoir, Lautrec and van Gogh lived and worked and for the most incredible, most romantic views from the steps of Sacre-Coeur at dusk. Lock lips atop the Eiffel Tower or Arc de Triomphe. Get a baguette, a brie and a bottle of Beaujolais for a picnic lunch in the Jardin des Tuileries. Stop by the bookseller's stalls along the banks of the Seine around Notre Dame – for wonderful French posters at great prices. Check out the Delacroix murals in the Chapel of Angels inside the Church of St Sulpice. Stop in and pay your respects to Napoleon under the magnificent 17th dome in the Hotel des Invalides. Take time to see the superb collection of Impressionist art at the Musée d'Orsay inside a beautifully converted train station, but don't leave without sharing a smooch and maybe a *pain chocolat* under the huge clock on the top floor. Steal kisses in the lovely garden inside the walls of the small Rodin Museum. Cross over the pont Neuf (the city's oldest bridge) to cuddle and coo over espresso at an outdoor café on the Square du Vert Galant in Ile de la Cité, but not before wending your way through streets bathed in history, quiet quays and gothic architecture of the place where Paris began. It's a good idea to pick up *Paris par Arrondissement* – the official street guide – at any travel bookstore in Paris or in many Chicago bookstores. You'll be glad you did. Still, if you need to hop on something – the Paris Metro is a no-brainer – and buses can't be beat for economical sightseeing. For a spin past many Paris landmarks, climb aboard No. 69 or 94.

Which brings us to the food. Basics first: Best croissants? Béchu on Avenue Victor-Hugo. Bet you can't eat just one! Best macaroons? Pierre Herme (he did his magic at Fauchon for years) on Rue Bonaparte. Best chocolate treats? Jacques Genin's tiny workshop on Rue St-Charles where he now welcomes chocoholics and the best hot chocolate in Paris, bar none, at Angéline on Rue de Rivoli. They actually melt down chocolate bars to a darkly rich, thick syrupy concoction. Best ice cream? To-die-for Berthillon

on Ile Saint-Louis. One of the most romantic dining experiences can be had at Jules Verne at the Eiffel Tower. Expensive and extraordinary – it will take a call months in advance to get a table (though lunch is an easier reservation). Ivy-covered Le Coupe Chou on Impasse Chartière (Lanneau) off a tiny medieval passageway welcomes lovers into charming centuries-old dining rooms scented with the woody smoke of the crackling fire. Cheek-to-cheek dancing and river views are on the menu Thursday nights at Kong on the Rue du Pont Neuf – the new Philippe Stark-designed eatery. For dining on *steak frites*, reserve a table at Alain Ducasse's hot now brasserie – Aux Lyonnais – on Rue St-Marc. Show up early at L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon on Rue de Montalembert, because no matter what time you go, there will be an interminable, but oh so worth it wait at what is one of the hottest restaurants in Paris, and they don't take reservations.

No one back home will believe you if you told them you went to Paris for your honeymoon and didn't shop – so you might as well. Shopping time should include window-browsing, at the very least, on Faubourg-St-Honoré – homage to glamour, fashion, high style and the world's most expensive shops. Another high-ticket option is the aforementioned Avenue Montaigne – a couturier Shangri-La from the likes of Chanel, Laurent, Dior and Lanvin. You haven't really seen Paris unless you walk the Champs-Élysées. Sure, it can be a bit touristy – but stores like the original, behemoth Sephora and the legendary Le Drugstore (think funky mini-mall) are worth looking into. For classic Paris boutique shopping, head over to Rue de Bac, Rue Grenelle and Rue Madame on the Left Bank. For department store aisle-hopping, Galeries Lafayette and Printemps, both on Boulevard Haussmann, are the two must-stops. If flea markets are your passion – get ready for what might be the hugest one you ever did see at Clignancourt.

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