

FRANCE

Gigi Griffis

100 LOCALS

TELL YOU
WHERE TO GO,
WHAT TO EAT,
& HOW TO FIT IN



Unconventional Travel Guides

CONTENTS

About this Book	4
On Traveling Like a Local	6
Tips for Fitting In	8
Plan By Interest	12
History & Architecture	13
Food & Wine	25
The Great Outdoors	35
Plan By Place	44
Paris & Northern France	45
<i>Paris, Chartres, Lille, Amiens, Reims, & Epernay</i>	
Normandy & Brittany	82
<i>Rouen, Evreux, Honfleur, Deauville, Étretat, Caen, Bayeux, Portbail, Mont Saint-Michel, Dinan, Rennes, Josselin, Locronan, & Nantes</i>	
Loire, Limousin, & Poitou	144
<i>Amboise, Blois, Cheverny, Chenonceaux, Tours, Montresor, Romorantin, Mouchamps, Cognac, La Rochelle, & Royère-de-Vassivière</i>	
Southwestern France	188
<i>Bordeaux, Saint-Émilion, Sarlat, Biarritz, Bayonne, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Monguilhem, Condom, Vallée de la Barousse, Toulouse, Albi, Millau, & Carcassonne</i>	
Southern France & the Riviera	245
<i>Nice, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Monaco, Menton, Èze, Antibes, Saint-Tropez, Marseille, Saint-Cyr-sur-Mer, Cassis, Aix-en-Provence, L'Isle-Sur-La-Sorgue, Vaison-la-Romaine, Avignon, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Les Baux-de-Provence, Uzès, Nîmes, Aigne, & Narbonne</i>	
Corsica	321
<i>Barbaggio, Zonza, & Sartène</i>	
Eastern France	329
<i>Lyon, Grenoble, Annecy, Chamonix, Cluny, Beaune, Dijon, Vézelay, Montbard, Strasbourg, Colmar, & Nancy</i>	
About the Author	386
Acknowledgements	387

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is for people who want to see another side of France.

To stroll past the main attractions, certainly, but also find the hidden-away boulangerie with the most delicious croissants in Paris. To discover that France has several long-distance pilgrimages, and pilgrims can stay in special refuges along the way. Or to know ahead of time that the French tend to dress well—and fitting in requires you to do the same.

In other words, this book is for people who want to get under the skin of another culture. Who want to rent apartments and live in local neighborhoods. Who want to eat in tiny restaurants without English menus. Who want to make friends with locals. Who want to deepen their experience of this sophisticated, charming country.

Think of this as a supplement to your traditional guidebooks.

Use those for their handy place histories, lists of local hotels (if that's your style), restaurant pricing charts, and basic language lessons. And then use this to go deeper—to figure out how to find the most colorful neighborhood markets, the most delicious restaurants in the city center, and that hidden-away hot spring just outside the city.

Getting excited? Me too. (Just wait till you read some of these interviews!)

Now, a little orientation:

This book is split into 100 interviews with people who live all over France. Many have lived in their cities and towns for decades. Some were born and raised in the region. Others are expats who have fallen in love with their new country. And all of them love showing travelers the best their place has to offer.

Throughout the book, you'll see a few common French words. Rather than include their meanings in parentheses 100 times throughout the book, I'd like to introduce them here. First, there's *bonjour*, which means hello. If you only learn one French word, learn this one. Other important words include

ABOUT THIS BOOK

pont (bridge), *musée* (museum), *château* (castle), *rue* (street), *île* (island), *plage* (beach), *place* (square), and *mont* (mountain). Thus, if you see Musée Toulouse-Lautrec mentioned here, that's the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum. If you see Rue de Varenne, that's Varenne Street. Mont Blanc is Mount Blanc.

Also throughout the book, below each person's name, you'll see a short bio designed to help you understand his or her background. If you are passionate about food, look for someone whose short bio includes "foodie" or "chef." If you're a culture lover, look for a culture lover. And so on and so forth.

Many of the interviewees are also tour guides, artists, business owners, or bloggers. Watch for web addresses under their interviews if you'd like to learn more about their art, blogs, tours, or businesses.

And speaking of web addresses, it's also important to note that while American sites often end in .com, French sites often end in .fr. You'll see many URLs throughout this book with that ending. There's no need to add a .com to these—just type them as you see them.

Finally, you'll notice this book doesn't have photos or maps. This is for length and printing reasons. The good news is that most tourist offices in France offer free maps, and you can find photos of all these places at gigigriffis.com/france.

Now, then, into the book...

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

PARIS

The iconic, mysterious capital full of world-renowned gastronomy, history, art, & culture. (Not to mention one of Europe's most-visited cities.)

FIND WI-FI HERE: Starbucks & many cafes.



Mark Jutton

History-Lover. Theater Buff. Musician. Traveler.

About Mark

I'm originally from a small town called Stafford in the center of England, but I always longed to move to a city. At 18, I moved to London to study and, after eight years there, it was time for me to explore life outside the UK. I moved to California for a while, then traveled across the Middle East and the Balkans to satisfy a curiosity about the events that had predominated the news during my childhood (namely the 1991 and 2003 Iraq wars, the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict and its effect on neighboring countries, and the Balkan war that ended in the mid-1990s). These two areas of the world continue to hold a fascination for me.

After that, my career took me to Milan and, now, Paris, where I work in medical advertising.

In my free time, I continue to travel a great deal (taking advantage of the long French holidays). I go to a number of concerts in Paris and abroad, mainly classical music and opera. I am a classically trained pianist, so taking advantage of the wealth of classical culture and the money the French arts council invests in music and opera here is a dream for me.

I also love cinema and can be regularly found in a movie theater on a rainy Sunday or a cold winter evening when everyone else prefers to stay at home.

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

What to do in Paris (the Basics)

I always give a similar tour to guests when they arrive for the first time: I live in the northwest, so the major tourist spot in this area is the Montmartre neighborhood, which typifies the quaint bohemian Paris found in Toulouse Lautrec paintings—that of can-can dancers, artsy cafés, and long philosophical conversations.

In Montmartre, you find the Sacré Coeur basilica, with its fantastic views of the city, the famous Moulin Rouge cabaret, the cute square around Abbesses, whose ornate metro sign is often used in guidebooks and posters to advertise Paris, and the village of Montmartre which, while full of tourists, is a wonderful rabbit warren of winding cobbled streets, steps dotted with ornate street lamps, cafés, art shops, and lots of charm.

A tip I always give is to climb up to the Sacré Coeur one of the back ways, avoiding the steps directly in front of the basilica (where you can get annoyingly harassed to buy cheap bracelets and tatty toys).

A second area I love is the Île de la Cité, where the impressive gothic cathedral of Notre Dame is found. Queue up to wander around the interior or queue to go onto the roof, be among the gargoyles, and enjoy yet another fabulous view over the city.

From here, it's easy to explore the Latin Quarter, which is just south of the river. The Latin Quarter radiates south from Saint-Michel and, once you've slipped past the tourists that clog the streets directly around Saint-Michel, you can start to enjoy the streets housing the Sorbonne (the beautiful old university house), Panthéon (a fascinating church-turned-mausoleum), and the gorgeous Jardin du Luxembourg, where you can sit on small green chairs under trees (the lawns are largely forbidden to sit on) and watch Paris families while away an afternoon and old men play boules/pétanques (the game of bowls, as it's called in the north vs. the south of France).

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

From the Latin Quarter, walk north through Saint-Germain where you'll find many designer shops.

Once you hit the river again, cross to its north side across the pedestrianized Pont des Arts, which is famous for carrying thousands of love locks (something that has become a Europe-wide craze in the last few years) and you will find yourself at the Louvre museum, famous for housing some of the world's greatest art pieces.

To the west of the Louvre is another large park called the Jardin des Tuileries, which spans all the way to the base of the Champs-Élysées shopping street. I am not a fan of the Champs-Élysées, but at one end of the avenue, you'll find Place de la Concorde, marked by the obelisk where executions used to take place during the French revolution and, at the other end, the Arc de Triomphe, where (once again) you can climb to the top and enjoy a view over the city (it's especially nice looking west toward La Défense, the financial district marked by the most modern buildings in the city).

Of course, there's also possibly the most famous Paris monument, the Tour Eiffel (Eiffel Tower) and the gardens surrounding it (the Champs des Mars); the Hôtel des Invalides, which is a large set of buildings dedicated to the military history of the country and the burial place for Napoleon; the Montparnasse tower; the Musée d'Orsay and its sister museum, the Orangerie; and the modern art complex at the Centre Pompidou. These are all worth seeing as well.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

The parks are places I love to hang out. In addition to the famous ones mentioned above, there are some wonderful green spaces a little further away, like Parc Monceau—a medium-sized green space in the 17th arrondissement—which is very popular with local families, joggers, picnickers, and walkers. Go for a stroll and take in the faux ruins and statues of poets and musicians.

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

Another wonderful park is Parc de la Villette in the northeast—home of the impressive concert and musical education center at the Cité de la Musique, as well as a portion of the beautiful Canal St. Martin.

The third park I'd recommend is the Bois de Boulogne—a huge, wild green space to the west, which is so full of forests and huge lakes that it feels like it is much further outside the city than it really is.

The three main cemeteries are also great strolling spaces for those who are interested in gothic mausoleums and looking for the resting places of famous poets, musicians, and public figures. There is a large cemetery at Montmartre near the Place de Clichy metro, another at Montparnasse, and the largest at Père Lachaise in the east.

A great area to feel quite Parisian is around the 10th arrondissement at Canal St. Martin, which is a popular spot to picnic in the summer along the water lined by independent bars and restaurants.

A similarly fantastic picnic spot in summer is the relatively new pedestrianized stretch of the river at the south end and running east and west of the Pont Alexandre III bridge, which links the Invalides to the Place de la Concorde. Here, on most nights of the week in the summer and especially at the weekend, Parisians descend with picnics and drinks to sit alongside the river until the early hours of the morning.

Additional neighborhoods that may not figure into a first-time tourist itinerary but are absolutely worth seeing include the Marais (the Jewish and gay neighborhood, which is full of life day and night) and Batignolles in the north, which is a self-styled new hipster haunt.

A slightly grittier area that has recently turned hipster (to the chagrin of veterans) is the area just south of Pigalle. As the debauchery of Paris after the heyday of the Moulin Rouge has gradually subsided, this area has started to become the

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

Brooklyn of Paris. Here, there is fun to be had at independent bars and clubs, with a dash of the unusual likely to be the norm!

Where to Stay

The 17th arrondissement around Villiers is very bourgeois Paris and doesn't see many tourists. The 15th arrondissement is similarly residential but maybe not as interesting to explore. Around St. Paul, the east of the Marais is bustling and central, as is Bastille, which is an interesting place to make a base just a little further east.

For those not wanting to stay right in the center, Neuilly-sur-Seine or La Défense could be interesting choices farther out and very Parisian (yet not lively) while still being easily accessible with public transport.

Day Trips

Versailles and Chantilly are very accessible on public transport.

What to Eat & Drink

The city serves up a collection of the best (and sometimes the worst) food from all over the country. Some classics: steak tartare (finely chopped raw beef with onions and seasonings), magret de canard (fattened duck breast), sole meunière (a special fried fish with butter sauce and lemon), andouillettes (intestine sausages—not for the faint of heart!), and any of the huge salads that can be served in most restaurants.

My personal favorites outside French cuisine include the numerous and fantastic Moroccan and Lebanese restaurants all over the city. A craze that is also popping up everywhere is fancy burgers and food trucks serving all sorts of cuisine that would not normally be associated with France.

A thing that is definitely worth taking advantage of is the lunch formules or meal deals in most restaurants during the week. These are two- or three-course meals (often with a glass of wine) that allow everyone to have a proper sit-down meal during the day and to try food that would probably cost much,

PARIS & NORTHERN FRANCE

much more in the evening. The prices can vary from €15 to €30 for such a deal and are very good value.

Visitors can also take advantage of the downloadable app The Fork (La Fourchette), which scans the city for deals of up to 60% off meals, provided you take at least two courses. It's a great way to discover new places and also allows tourists with limited French to make a booking and have it confirmed without having to speak to someone over the phone.

Where to Eat & Drink (Favorite Bars & Restaurants)

Restaurants include Le Mechoui du Prince, which is a fantastic Moroccan restaurant in the Latin Quarter on the same street as the very pleasant old wine bar/restaurant where they filmed scenes from the Woody Allen movie *Midnight in Paris*. Address: 36 Rue Monsieur le Prince. Phone: +33 1 40 51 88 48.

Near Bastille and St. Paul, there is a place called Chez Janou, which specializes in southern French food. The interior is decorated very randomly, yet charmingly, with old posters, paintings, decorative tiles, and southern French nostalgia. The atmosphere is fabulously lively and convivial and tables are so close that you feel like you are part of your neighbors' meal, which often promotes conversation over some fantastic wines from Provence and Languedoc. Address: 2 Rue Roger Verlomme. Phone: +33 1 42 72 28 41.

Down a small side street in Saint-Germain is a fun café/restaurant called Le Petula. It's quite modern and relaxed but always full. It's a great casual dining experience in an otherwise rather touristy area with a large menu and a good two- or three-course meal deal for lunch and dinner. Address: 6 Rue des Ciseaux. Phone: +33 1 44 41 01 09.

Best Places to Take a Photo

I love the views from Sacré Coeur, Montparnasse tower, Tour Eiffel, or the top of the Arc de Triomphe.

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your copy at gigigriffis.com!