

How To Do Paris In Three Days ...

Arne Luker
Euro Traveller

WHO THE hell does Paris think it is? All the art, culture, history and romance. Yet this city remains so aloof.

You don't want to fall for someone who doesn't care. So you try to act cool. The Eiffel Tower? It's not that big. The Louvre? It's too big. The hotel room? Too cramped. The Streets? Too busy. A pint of Stella? Too expensive (€7.50, £5!). That intimate prix fixe (set-priced menu) restaurant that you found where you had a small-vineyard champagne and a dozen oysters that burst with the flavours of Brittany? You're in love.

Brussels to Paris in 1 and 1/2 hours, not bad! An old friend of mine picked me up at the Gare du Nord and we took the bus right through the centre to the Avenue des Gobelins where he and his wife live for half of

the year and where my hotel was located. Even from the bus Paris is fantastic but it is better if you are doing it by foot.

After approximately 1.5 miles I stood in front of the gothic masterpiece Cathédrale de Notre Dame de Paris, Cathedral of Our Lady of Paris, on the Île de la Cité, the metaphorical and literal heart of Paris. Built on a site first occupied by a Roman temple and then two earlier Christian churches, the first stone was laid by Pope Alexander III in 1163 and it was finally completed about 1330. The remarkable and spectacular rose windows are lovely to watch from outside but breathtaking from the inside when the sun is setting.

Later on, together with some Parisians I enjoyed the wonderful Seine views before heading back to my friend's house. He wanted to show me Paris by night!

And that's wonder-

ful. All the old houses, palaces and monuments are illuminated. The Eiffel Tower even has a light show (on the hour, 10 min)! I'm sure I don't have to tell you about the Eiffel Tower except for one thing: did you know that the size of the Eiffel Tower (320 m) can vary as much as 15 cm, since the 7000-tonne iron tower expands in warm weather and contracts when it's cold?

On the next morning I walked all the way from les Îles to the Arc de Triomphe, Triumphant March, by passing the massive Louvre, Jardin Carrousel and Jardin des Tuileries, le Place de Concorde – where thousands met the blade during the Revolution – and the Champs Élysées. A great walk which takes in many of Paris' highlights in one hit.

I visited the Jewish Quarter and the elegant Place de Vosges. This part of Paris is known as Marais and has a

more settled character than the other side of the Seine. It is full of art, antiques and a few Jews of course. Victor Hugo (Les Misérables) lived there. Don't miss the toilet in the left hand side Bar on Place du Marché Ste-Catherine - I spent hours in there exploring all the funny things. In the evening, when it was dark again, my friend and I took a bus tour through Paris and a river trip on the Seine. Apart from the loud lady who explained all the highlights in really bad English the bus and boat were supremely relaxing after a whole day of walking.

On day three when my legs were a bit sore already, I went to Montmartre where the Moulin Rouge is situated. That was a bit hilly and totally different from the rest of Paris. Twisting, narrow streets, tiny houses and a bohemian village feel. Van Gogh lived her, and Eric Satie and

Dali. But the best is the view from the immense Basilique du Sacré Cœur (Basilica of the Sacred Heart). It sits perched on the summit of the Butte de Montmartre (Montmartre Hill, the highest point in Paris). While it looks much older, I was surprised to learn that the Basilica was only consecrated in 1919 as an act of contrition following the humiliating Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1.

Taking the 234 spiraling steps to the basilica's dome affords one of Paris' most spectacular panoramas – which extends up to 30 km on a clear day.

And then it was time for me to go. Trains don't wait for you. There was just enough time to have a last pint of Stella for £5 in front of the station. And because that was so annoying I had the same back in Leuven for £2

