

THE 
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A special Traveller supplement

Beyond the boulevards

An insider's guide to Paris



Paris in private

Venture beyond the tourist hot spots for a glimpse of the real capital, says **Sandrine Voillet**

We all know Paris. Or at least we think we do. It's the capital of the most visited country in the world, and it often seems that tourists "know" the French capital even better than we Parisians. Of course, tourists see it in a different way from regular inhabitants of the 20 *arrondissements*. Certainly, many more foreign visitors than Parisians have climbed the Eiffel Tower. Having said that, the French capital deserves its glorious reputation. It has been carefully planned so as to offer grand panoramas from any angle: a formidable showcase of monuments, glamour, boutiques, fine restaurants and cafés.

But there is another, more private side to Paris. The side that we Parisians see every day. Luckily, you don't have to look hard in order to find it. For an example, simply head to Montmartre. Despite the breathtaking view over Paris, in my opinion the most charming side of Montmartre is not the Esplanade of the Sacré-Coeur. Instead I prefer the route along rue Saint Vincent behind the Basilique, beside the very last Parisian vineyard (of which only a few acres are left). In the Middle Ages, when Benedictine nuns owned the place, the Butte was covered with vines, and every September the fraternity of viticulturists still come from all over France in traditional costumes to the Montmartre wine festival. It's a reminder of how Paris once was.

Stick to the back streets of Montmartre, and at 12 rue Cortot you'll find the plain, shuttered façade of the Musée Montmartre. In 1876, Auguste Renoir rented a workshop here to work on his famous painting *Le Moulin de la Galette*. Ten years later, painter Suzanne Valladon and her son Maurice Utrillo lived on the first floor. These days, the restored interior contains a small art gallery.

Going down the Butte, if you walk along Boulevard de Rochechouart and glance above the rather gruesome shops, you'll find many fading vestiges of the Belle Epoque – a time when the bourgeois and tourists came to Montmartre to let their hair down. Here lies the white stucco façade of the Elysée Montmartre theatre, with a cancan dancer kicking her heels above the main entrance. Nowadays the Elysée and nearby Trianon theatres are still music venues – but the cancan has given way to independent rock gigs.

Proceed further down into the ninth *arrondissement* – a district built in the 1830s and known for its elegant architecture and white window shutters – and you'll soon leave the cold grandeur of Haussmannian town planning far behind. This area used to be called "La Nouvelle Athènes" because so many artists lived there, including Gustave Moreau, Eugène Delacroix, Chopin and Georges Sand. Chopin and Sand lived for a while in Square d'Orléans, a curiously English-looking place, styled in the manner of a West London private square. Nearby, the home and workshop of symbolist painter Gustave Moreau has been turned into a museum exhibiting his works, at 14 Rue de la Rochefoucauld.

But for something really off the beaten track, head to Le Musée de la Vie Romantique, once the house and workshop of romantic painter Ary Scheffer. At the end of a leafy alleyway lies a two-storey house with pink shutters surrounded by a rose garden. Delacroix, Chopin and Sand were among the regulars at Scheffer's Thursday-night dinners. You can just imagine them all discussing how romantic



Hidden charm: enjoy a different view of Paris on rue Saint Vincent (above) or at the Grand Mosque (right)

Alamy

ideals would be transcribed into painting, music and literature. Nowadays, on the ground level, the house exhibits Georges Sand memorabilia: jewels, a paper-knife mistaken as a dagger by former lover and writer Alfred de Musset, and a plaster cast of her delicate hand.

Meanwhile, in the heart of the Latin Quarter (which owes its name to the Latin-speaking scholars from the Middle Ages), sits an unusual piece of Parisian architecture. The Grand Mosque, built in Moroccan style, offers a scent of the Orient in one of the older parts of Paris. Here you can enjoy a mint tea in the café or a walk in the superb courtyard – reminiscent of the Alhambra gardens in Spain. The mosque was built in homage to all the Muslims who lost their lives fighting for France during the First World War.

Also worth visiting are the galleries around the second *arrondissement*. These 19th-century glass-and-iron passageways were built to let people shop while being sheltered from the weather and traffic. Nowadays the elegant galleries are still adorned with exquisite boutiques. Try Galerie Vivienne, which has a fine wine shop, a vintage bookshop, and several fashion boutiques (Jean Paul Gaultier is just around the corner).

Paris is renowned for its green spaces, but for something a little bit different, try the Buttes Chaumont park. Once an empty field, it was revamped in the 19th century to create one of Paris's most peaceful open spaces. Set in the east of Paris, it

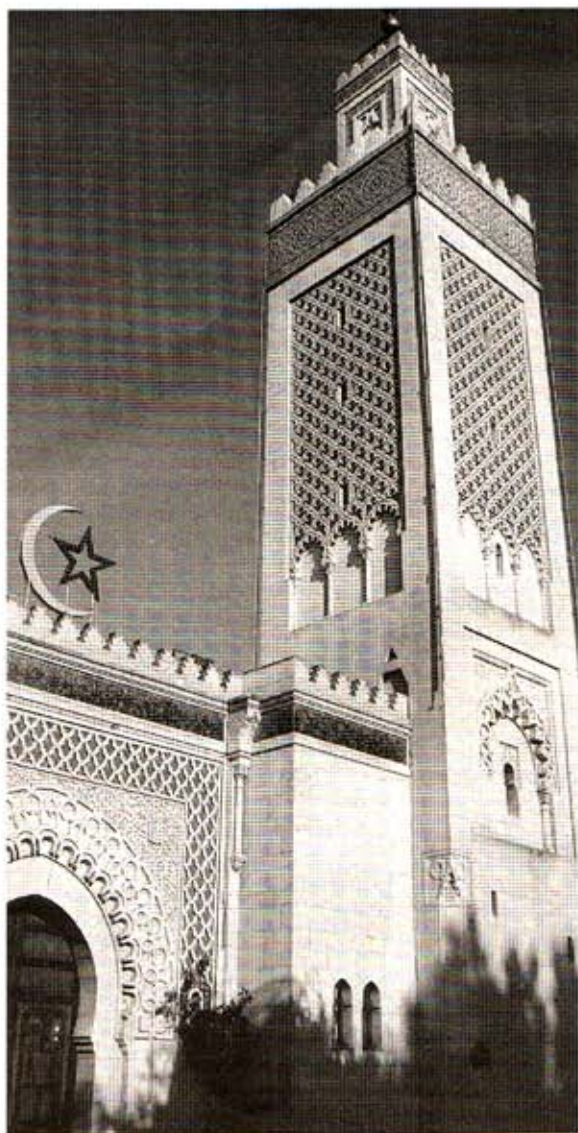
contains an artificial rocky landscape, with an elegant Greek temple on top, offering a stunning view of the side. Down this "mountain" runs a waterfall, and the exterior is surrounded by green patches ideal for a sunny Parisian picnic. The east of Paris has more to offer: at night, the small cafés of boulevard de Ménilmontant wake up, with locals cluttering the pavement tables. Meanwhile, Rue de Charonne has become an extension of the trendy Bastille area, with cafés and bistros scattered among more formal restaurants and craft shops.

After a hard day's sightseeing, it's worth taking stock in the late afternoon. What Parisians call *L'heure bleue* (the blue hour) begins now, with the light fading. It takes far longer than a day or two for Paris to yield all of her secrets – even now, having lived in the city for years, there are still alleyways, buildings and hidden corners that I discover almost daily – but for those who visit Paris only briefly, at least you'll know the city that little bit better now.

Sandrine Voillet presents 'Paris', a three-part series for BBC2 starting on Tuesday at 9pm (digital viewers will be able to watch the series in either English or French). 'Sandrine's Paris: A cultural history of the world's most romantic city' by Sandrine Voillet is published by BBC Books (£20).

Cover photo: Getty Images/Rubberball

You can just imagine Delacroix, Chopin and Sand discussing romantic ideals over dinner



ROOM SERVICE

Hôtel de la Cité Carcassonne

There is more than a touch of Disney about the French city of Carcassonne. From the moment you set eyes on its turretted walls, you feel as if you are about to step into some sort of fairytale. Set on a hill overlooking the river Aude in the heart of the Languedoc, Carcassonne's origins lie in Roman times.

Its battlements were completed during the turbulent Middle Ages, later falling into a miserable state of repair. The ensuing 19th-century restoration carried out by Viollet-le-Duc is a little bit too perfect for some of the purists, but nowadays the only invaders Carcassonne needs to worry about are the tourists. As a result, the charming cobbled streets of the ancient Cité – the rest of Carcassonne sits at the foot of the hill – are crammed with souvenir shops and restaurants.

Still, there is no denying the Cité's romantic charm and The Hôtel de la Cité, is the ideal place to escape the rabble. Although most of the hotel was built in 1909 on the site of the former episcopal palace, the medieval theme continues inside its lofty public spaces. The marble reception hall gives way to a sweeping Gothic staircase and an atmospheric panelled library bar. There is also the Michelin-starred La Barbacane restaurant.

Carcassonne is also perfectly placed for exploring the ravishing countryside beyond the Cité's walls; the langorous Canal du Midi, the Minervois, the Hérault



and the Corbières. The Hôtel de la Cité is also one of just two hotels within the ancient Cité – so once the tourists have left, guests and the 150 local residents have it more or less to themselves.

LOCATION

Hôtel de la Cité, Place Auguste-Pierre Pont, Carcassonne, France (00 33 4 68 71 98 71; www.hoteldelacite.com).

The hotel forms part of the Cité's walls and is sandwiched between its two most important attractions, the Cathedral of St Nazaire and the Château Comtal.

Time from international airport: It's about 15 minutes' drive from Carcassonne airport. Once you have arrived at the city walls, one of the hotel's dinky shuttle buses will come and whisk you through the tiny, car-free streets.

COMFORTABLE?

The 42 rooms and 19 suites continue the theme, although there is nothing medieval about the facilities. Every room is unique. Ours, number 233, was set in an original medieval house across the street from the hotel-proper which was linked by a warren of stairs and corridors. Set on the first

floor and cantilevered over a fork in the street every time I looked out the window someone was snapping away, camera hand. Oak panelling, terracotta floors, leaded windows and an open fire set the scene. At the end of a giant half-canopied bed was a bizarre faux chest, which at the flick of a button revealed a pop

TRAVELLER'S GUIDE

Musée Montmartre
12 Rue Cortot
(00 33 46 06 61 11;
www.musee-demontmartre.fr)
Open 11am-6pm daily.
Admission €7 (£5).

Gustave Moreau Museum
14 Rue de Rochefoucauld
(00 333 48 74 38 50;
www.musee-moreau.fr)
Open 10am-12.45pm and 2pm-5.15pm daily.

Le Musée de la Vie Romantique
16 Rue Chapel (00 33 55 31 95 67; www.vie-romantique.paris.fr). Open daily except Monday 10am-6pm. Admission: €4.57 (£3.20).

Elysée Montmartre
72 Boulevard de Rochechouart.
(00 33 44 92 45 47;
www.elysee-montmartre.com).

Le Grand Mosque
2 Bis Place Du Puits de L'ermite
(00 33 45 35 97;
www.mosquee-de-paris.net).

Galerie Vivienne
4 Rue de Petits Champs and 6 Rue Vivienne.

Buttes Chaumont park
Rue Botzaris, Manin
Open 7.30am-11pm in the summer and 7.30am-9pm in the winter.

Laze in a South West French village this summer

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