



INTRODUCTION to the fifth edition & BEFORE YOU GO

The math seems frightening, but undeniable. My wife Arlene and I have been visiting Paris since our first trip in 1964, so that does add up to nearly forty-five years. There was a very large gap because of our founding and owning a small winery in the Napa Valley in the '70s and early '80s. When we had our freedom from winery responsibilities we concentrated on travel to "third world" countries. In 1991 we had not been to Paris in nearly 24 years. Our destination that year was South Africa. It appeared that going through Paris offered the most favorable airfare. So we decided to break up the very long trip from San Francisco to Cape Town by stopping in Paris for two days on each end of the trip. Those four days made us realize how much we had missed this beautiful city and it revived our interest in making it a destination.

Beginning in 1992 we were doing a lot of traveling in Europe, and we would conclude these trips with a few days in Paris; whether it was four, five, or even seven days it was not a sufficient amount of time to satisfy our growing interest in the city. We then decided to celebrate the Millennium in Paris on December 31, 1999 with a few days before and after that significant date.

On December 30 while we were riding on the Métro in Paris I turned to Arlene and said "why don't we come here for four weeks next time and get this place out of our system?" There was no disagreement about the suggestion, so we did come to Paris for four weeks in the fall of 2000. It was a wonderful four weeks, but it certainly was a failure as far as "getting it out of our system." It made us realize that even after four weeks there were many things still on our list of things to do and places to go. In 2001 we came for a month followed by five weeks in 2002, and since 2003, six weeks annually. In 2007 we stretched it to seven weeks; 2008 will be close to that.

One thing has become very clear. Paris is our favorite city in the world. It is beautiful, has great museums, exhibitions, salons, parks and gardens, and in my opinion the best food. There are so many layers that a stay of significant duration allows one to go a little deeper into the great things that it has to offer.

Here I summarize our experiences, give our biased opinions and hope that you, the reader, will benefit from our mistakes and successes. We hope to take the trial and error out of your shorter visits. I want to emphasize that this guide is personal in that it reflects how we like to experience Paris based on our likes and dislikes.

The sources I use are restaurant and bistrot guides, primarily those written in French and not available in the United States. I also subscribe to travel newsletters and magazines, and clip newspaper articles that may have some good ideas. My favorite bistrot

guide is “Le Petit Lebey des Bistrots Parisiens.” A guide by Pudlo that formerly was only available in French is now published in English. But I do not consider it nearly as reliable as Lebey or Michelin. However, with my Guide it is not really necessary to buy any of these because I have done the research for you. You, the reader, have become another very important source.

Prices in the Guide are all given in Euros. In 2002 the Euro was around 86 cents, when I published the Fourth Edition it was around \$1.15 to \$1.18. As of my current writing, it is at \$1.56. If you include the percentage you pay for using a credit card it is over \$1.60. Five or six years ago our average bistrot dinner with a bottle of wine was around \$75-\$80. In 2007 we had only one dinner that was under \$100. The vast majority are in the \$140-\$160 range. So prices for restaurants have basically doubled. What goes down usually comes back up but neither I nor anybody else can really say how low the dollar will sink. Nor can we say when it might start to recover. My guess is that it will be a very long time. This raises the question of why we keep going. Put simply it still has the best food in the world and the city is wonderful.

One of the pleasures I derive from this labor of love is hearing back from people. I will greatly appreciate any reports or comments, negative or positive, on anything about Paris whether it is in this Guide or not. Please write with your suggestions, experiences, and discoveries to Michael@BernsteinParis.com

TOOLS

Maps

The most important tool is a good map. My favorite used to be the Michelin Paris Atlas Eleven, but it is no longer published, and has been replaced by the Michelin Plan Atlas Fifty Six which is an improvement because it is smaller and has less extraneous material. Like the “eleven” it is a book of maps in a blue cover with an index to every street in Paris and all Métro stations are noted in red. I find this comprehensive index of streets invaluable; because of it I have always been able to locate a street in Paris. The other great feature of this Michelin Fifty Six is that on each street there is a number or several numbers that tell you what direction the numbers are running and which side has the even and odd numbers. When exiting the Métro you will usually see a sign that has the street name followed by pairs (even numbers) or impairs (odd numbers). These features make it much easier to decide which Métro stop to exit and which way to go once you get to that station. Although this map is available in the U.S. it is not that easy to locate. It is of course widely available in Paris.

In conjunction with this map I use the free map of the transportation system which is available at all Métro stations. The one you want is the large fold-out variety which measures about 15 by 25 inches when wide-open. There are three versions of this free map, but the one I prefer is called Plan des Lignes. In addition to the Métro system all of these maps have the RER and bus systems. However, if you plan to use the bus system you will need a specific map of the bus system. It is so much nicer to travel above ground, but it is not easy. The problem is trying to figure out where the bus actually stops for passengers. The drivers are always very helpful in sending you to the right place.

Another alternative is one called Paris Pratique par Arrondissement. It is the same size as the Fifty-Six but only about one-fourth as thick and has a very good index of streets. The disadvantage is that the streets have no numbers so I can't tell which way to walk without actually walking in one direction and seeing which way the numbers are running and whether they are odd or even. Numbers on buildings are often few and far between so for me this is a major disadvantage. But if it is compactness that you want, this is the map to buy. As far as I know it is not available in the U.S. but is readily available in Paris.

There is another map that is given out by hotels and department stores. It is fine for general planning purposes, but no substitute for the Michelin Fifty-Six.

Dictionary

Any standard book type dictionary with sufficient vocabulary is going to be too large and bulky to carry with you. So the answer is a nice compact electronic dictionary. Starting in 1991 we used the Franklin BFQ-450 with great success. A French friend admired it so we gave it to her and purchased a BFQ 450-02. It is considerably lighter and has sufficient vocabulary. We used it for six weeks in 2007 and it worked very well, but suddenly stopped working. It turned out that there was a stuck key and it simply needed to be reset. I cannot find anything similar on the internet; Franklin seems to be the only show in town. It is readily available on the internet.

TRANSPORTATION

Unless you travel mostly by taxi I recommend getting a Carte Orange for use on the Métro, RER, and buses. It is issued either for a week or a month. To get one issued you will need a small photo. If you are in Paris for five days it pays to get the Carte Orange with a one-week ticket. There is an advantage in only having one ticket instead of the ten issued as a carnet, and there is a large saving in cost. Get the ticket good for zones one and two; seldom will you need more. Be aware that the one-week ticket runs from Monday A.M. to the next Monday A.M. so if you arrive in Paris on a Saturday or Sunday there is no point in getting the one-week ticket because you would only be able to use it for a day or two. You would be better off buying individual tickets or a carnet and then getting the one-week ticket on a Monday morning when it would be good for seven days.

Sometime in 2009 the Carte Orange will be phased out in favor of the Navigo Découverte which works like the "oyster card" in London. Again you will need a passport picture and to pay 5€ which is good for ten years. They will then give you a plastic sleeve to put the card in. A month card which starts on the first of each month is 55.10€ and a week card which starts on Monday costs 16.80€. So instead of inserting a ticket you will swish the card over a Navigo terminal; it will work on the buses and RER also.

When using the Métro it is usually a good idea to avoid changing lines; often the underground walk from one line to another can be as long as two Métro stops, and it is more pleasant to walk above ground than below.

ACTIVITIES GUIDES

Pariscope is a publication available at the news kiosks every Wednesday morning for 0.40€. It is a comprehensive listing of exhibitions, movies, concerts, museums, art exhibits, restaurants, flea markets, foires (fairs), salons (shows) and virtually every conceivable type of entertainment in Paris and the suburbs for the week of publication. It is published in French; the small English section has been eliminated. We find it invaluable in helping us plan the best bets for the week. Major art exhibitions are usually at the Grand Palais, Musée d'Orsay, Musée du Luxembourg, and the Centre Pompidou. But there are also lesser-known places with fine exhibitions such as, for example, the Fondation Cartier, Japan Cultural Center, and the Fondation Mona Bismarck. Pariscope will list all exhibitions, major and minor, including the times, open days, cost, and closest Métro stop. I cannot overemphasize the importance of buying this publication as soon as you arrive in Paris. Aside from a good map (and this Guide!), Pariscope is the most essential tool.

There is a competing publication called *L'Officiel des Spectacles* that also comes out on Wednesday morning; it sells for about the same price. We have not found it to be as comprehensive as Pariscope; it is about 195 pages instead of 280, and the consensus of opinion of the people in the kiosks who sell them is that Pariscope is superior. However, a reader of this Guide prefers *L'Officiel des Spectacles*; she is an avid classical music fan. We did compare the two on this subject and she is correct; more concerts are listed than in Pariscope, so if you have a strong interest in music you may have to buy both publications.

I used to recommend buying the Michelin Red Guide to Paris because in some previous editions I had not listed addresses and phone numbers of restaurants and hotels. Now I list addresses, phone numbers, Métro stations, etc. of all recommended restaurants so it is not necessary to carry the Paris Red Guide with you.

Although not essential, a Paris Green Guide is a helpful tool especially if you go to a place for the first time. Its disadvantage is considerable bulk. I overcome this by doing the unthinkable: rip out the sections relevant to the day's activity thereby carrying only the pages needed.

TELEPHONES

Public telephones are becoming as rare as they are in the US because of the cell phone revolution. Most phones being sold today work in Europe; you can use it by getting international roaming, but the costs per call are high. Because of this and because of our long visits we each purchased inexpensive phones in France. Go to a telephone or electronics store and purchase an inexpensive phone and a SIM card. With the chip you will get your phone number and a certain number of credits in Euros. Extra cards can be purchased and added to your credit when you need it. There are three cell phone providers in France; we used Bouygues Telecom and are very satisfied with their service and coverage. If we were doing it today I would choose one of the other companies because Bouygue stores seem to be in a distinct minority compared to

the others. Calls within France are about \$0.40 a minute which is certainly not inexpensive, but still a lot less costly than using your U.S. phone. There is no charge for incoming calls, even from the U.S. There are many stores that sell phones and SIM cards and although we have used DARTY there are many others and we have no favorite. Calls to the U.S. were about \$1.50 per minute so it would be best to use another means for these calls, such as the MCI card that we have used for many years. The MCI card can also be used for calls within France and other countries in Europe and the cost is not unreasonable. For calls to the United States and to other countries in Europe it is advisable to have a prepaid phone card. The MCI card is available at Costco. Calls to the U.S. from France are 20 cents per minute; the same card can be used to call France from the U.S. for 12 cents per minute. The card is rechargeable and the latest version does not expire. We find it extremely useful.

GEAR

Footwear

As essential as a good map are comfortable walking shoes and socks. We do a tremendous amount of walking and I highly recommend Mephisto shoes with the speed laces. They are homely, but no footwear is as comfortable for walking all day. Several models are available with Gore-Tex, and they are absolutely waterproof, although they are a little heavy. They have a new line out which is called "Allrounder" that are less expensive, lighter, but still very comfortable (but no speed laces). On a recent trip to Argentina where we did a lot of hiking we found them to be excellent. There are a lot of stores in Paris that specialize in Mephistos and they cost a little more than half of U.S. prices, and if you buy more than one pair you get the VAT tax back which saves you about another 15%. By far the best selection (they have all models in all colors and sizes and a very competent staff) is a Mephisto Concept Store at 116, Avenue du General Leclerc in the 14th. Métro stop Alesia or Porte d'Orleans, telephone 01-45-40-74-75. If you go on the Mephisto Concept Store Website (via Google) there are other Mephisto Concept stores listed in the 1st, 7th, 8th, 15th and 17th arrondissements. We have been to the one at 78, rue des Saint-Peres in the 7th, but the one on General Leclerc is much bigger and better. Comfortable socks are almost as important as the shoes. Smart Wool is definitely my favorite, but there are other good brands such as Patagonia. They are widely available at sporting goods stores in the U.S.

Umbrellas

A good compact umbrella that will not turn inside out with the first gust of wind is another important item to have. The only kind to buy is the type that has a double layer construction allowing the wind to blow through the holes in the outer layer of fabric. Without this the umbrella merely inverts and becomes useless when there is strong wind with the rain. Since I published the Fourth Edition I have tried about six different brands and they all had something wrong with them. They were either too heavy, too long, or broke after a short time. My current favorite is called "TOTES". It is available from Ace Luggage & Gifts. Look under "Vented Wind Proof" and you will find three models. The one I like best is only 11.6 inches when closed and sells for \$21.99. There is a larger version for just \$24.99 and it has a 70 inch canopy when open. Get one before you go because I have been to every department store in Paris, but was unable to find one.

If you have an umbrella that you value, as opposed to the generic \$4.99 variety, you should not leave it stacked with all of the other umbrellas near the coat rack when you walk into a bistro. My umbrella was taken at a popular bistro and the thief left his broken generic one for me. This also happened at a two star restaurant. Never again. The umbrella goes to the table with me regardless of the custom. Taking it to the table also decreases the chance of leaving the place without it.

PROTECTING YOUR VALUABLES

A parka is a very useful item for protection against the weather and it has a valuable secondary purpose. If you carry a purse you can hide it by having it under the parka. This is probably the best way to defend against purse-snatchers and pickpockets. There has been a very significant increase in pickpockets recently and it is unwise to carry any valuables in your pockets, especially a wallet in the back pocket. Be particularly guarded on the Métro where pickpockets seem to work diligently.

For years we both have been using a very helpful travel aid called a Healthy Back Bag by Ameribag. It is actually a bag that is worn on the shoulder and the medium size which measures about 19 inches long is the one we use. It has many pockets with zippers or Velcro and the recommended size is large enough to hold an umbrella, a parka, jacket, or sweater along with the travel guides and maps that you may need for a day's outing plus some items you may purchase. They are lightweight and come with an adjustable strap that holds fairly securely to the shoulder leaving your hands free. The medium size in microfiber is about \$79 on their website. The website is www.ameribag.com. Other websites and most travel stores also carry them, perhaps at lower prices. We have both used this item for the past six years and would not travel without one.

It is best to keep valuables such as cash, credit cards, passports, etc. in a purse or pouch that can be secured around the waist, or on your shoulder under a parka or jacket. One made by Baggalini called the "Baggalini Wallet Bagg I" is very well designed and versatile with lots of places for your valuables, and straps for securing it around the waist, shoulder, neck or on your belt. The Bagg I is 8 x 5 x 1 inches and weighs 4 ounces and costs \$32.00. A slightly larger size called the Bagg II is now available. It measures 9 x 7 x 1 and weighs 5 ounces and costs \$39.95. They are available from Packing Light. The website is www.packinglight.com and the phone number is 800-349-0525. To find this item on the website type in Baggalini Wallet Bagg. Arlene has been using one for about six years and it is really the answer to where to put valuables, etc.

PROTECTING YOUR VALUABLES FROM TSA (TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION)

Do not put anything of value in your checked baggage. I made the mistake of leaving my backup Palm TX (Palm Pilot) in its case in my checked bag. When I got home and unpacked the case was there, but the Palm was gone. Also in the bag was a note from TSA that my bag had been opened by them. After months of filing a claim and many e-mails and correspondence my

claim of \$250 was flatly denied. They suggested that I contact “lost and found”! or file a lawsuit in the Federal District Court in San Francisco. A good friend made a much worse mistake than me. She checked her laptop; it also was stolen.

CURRENCY

Speaking of money, the days of using traveler’s checks are over. We have not used a traveler’s check in Europe for over ten years. An ATM card and credit cards are all that you will need. The exchange rate given when using an ATM card is the best that you can get and the machines are all over the place including the airports. Almost every restaurant and even the Métro accept credit cards. Credit card companies now on foreign transactions are adding three percent over the official exchange rate. This makes the use of credit cards significantly more costly to use than cash obtained from an ATM, but credit cards are more convenient and one does accrue air miles for each dollar spent. Visa and MasterCard are accepted virtually everywhere, but American Express is very unpopular in France because of their high fees, and usually is accepted only at the costlier establishments.

ATTIRE

I used to wear a suit and tie when going to three-star and other fancy restaurants, but it is no longer necessary. Dress in restaurants has changed dramatically in the past five years. In one-star or other somewhat formal restaurants men usually wear sport jackets without ties although men without jackets are becoming more common. In bistros, brasseries, wine bars, and other informal places, blue jeans or slacks and a sweater are perfectly acceptable.