

Jardin Albert Kahn

This is our favorite garden in Paris, although it is actually not quite in the city of Paris; it is in Boulogne-Billancourt. To get here take the number 10 Métro line west to the last stop which is Boulogne-Pont de St-Cloud, and you are there. We have been there in February, March, October, November, and December so we have never really seen it at its best, but even in the middle of winter it is beautiful. One time when we went for a visit a French man was leaving as we were entering, and he said “You are about to enter paradise.” We would not disagree. Every time we go to Paris we spend an afternoon at this marvelous, but relatively undiscovered, place.

The garden (actually it is more like a small park) is divided into several sections. There is a Japanese inspired garden, an English garden, espaliered fruit trees, flowing water, and a woods-like area with large trees. The latter was closed for several years because of damage from the great storm of December 26, 1999, but it has been reopened. A heavily urbanized area surrounds the garden, so it is like an oasis in the urban desert. There is also a Museum, which specializes in historic photography, but the reason to go here is the wonderful garden. Open daily (except Monday) from 11:00 to 6:00 (7:00 in the summer).

Viaduc des Arts

This is a brilliant piece of urban planning. There was an abandoned rail line that formerly ran from the Bastille to the suburbs. Rather than tear it down the City of Paris used the 60 vaulted archways below the tracks to accommodate artisan shops. There are copper pot makers, furniture makers, silversmiths, and many other artisans; there are shops with very unusual and interesting things. From number one to number 129, avenue Daumesnil there are about 50 craftsmen and creators. Our favorite is a unique and fascinating store called Atelier N’O at number 21. Another very interesting one is Vertical at number 63. On top of the arches where the rail line existed is a long Promenade Plantée which is a walkway with trees, gardens, and wonderful open space and fine views of Paris below.

The best way to visit is to start at the Bastille and walk down rue de Lyon on the side of the Opera House past the Opera House parking lot and go up the stairs at the first elevated structure you see. You can walk on the Promenade as far as you like. It is actually possible to go almost to the Bois de Vincennes. On the way back you can walk below and visit the fascinating shops. It is remarkable how Paris transformed a slum into a wonderful open space with gardens and still was able to cater to the commercial (high class) development below. People with homes that formerly overlooked the abandoned rail line now look out on gardens and open space. They have benefited aesthetically, and I am sure their property values have soared. Walking the entire length of the Promenade and seeing the shops on the way back could easily take the entire afternoon; it would be well spent. Métro Bastille.

These next gardens are not hidden away or hard to find; they are included because they are some of the delights of the city:

Parc Monceau

This is a very nice park in an “upper class” high rent area of the 8th arrondissement. There is a lot of open green space surrounded by some of the most elegant residences in the city. The landscaping and the numerous very large old trees are extremely well maintained. A familiar scene is fashion plate kids and their nannies. It is a very pleasant place for a walk and for people watching, combined with a visit to the two museums out its gate: the Nissim de Comondo and the Cernuschi . Métro Monceau.

Jardin des Plantes

Open to the public since 1640, and used and enjoyed ever since, it is always a pleasure to take a stroll on a sunny day, say hello to the giant dragon made of recycled aluminum who greets one almost at the entrance and seeing the latest experiments with tomato varieties, or chard tucked amidst the riotously colorful flower borders. There are grand hothouses that have been closed forever, but once renovated should be spectacular. And a school of botany that maintains a medicinal plant garden with identification tags, an alpine garden which had an entrance fee and limited hours on the weekend we visited. Also a rose garden and labyrinth, and a little zoo with a 7€ entrance fee and the natural history museum next door. Address: 57, rue de Couvier; Métro Gare d'Austerlitz or Jussieu.

Tuileries

You don't need me to recommend a visit to the Tuileries, as you'll undoubtedly pass through it time and again on your way to the Louvre, Orangerie or Jeu de Paume, but take the time to meander through the outdoor sculpture exhibits if there are any. Métro Tuileries.

Luxembourg Garden

It feels like the elegant big backyard for the population living around it. Young mothers or nannies wheeling strollers, children playing in the falling autumn leaves, gentlemen and ladies of a certain age taking the sunshine in the little chairs lined up along the fountainhead pond, lovers and office workers sharing a picnic or a newspaper reading break, and of course tourists having their pictures taken with the elegant backdrops of statues and chrysanthemums cascading from the balustrades. It's the perfect place to take the 2000 feuille Napoleon you've just purchased at Pierre Hermé on rue Bonaparte (ask for plastic fork and napkin with purchase), set out your treasure on a chair and have a feast before going to the Luxembourg museum with your pre-purchased ticket if there is a blockbuster exhibit there. Not easily accessible by Métro, although the Odéon stop is the closest. The RER stop Luxembourg is quite close.

Palais-Royal Gardens

This wonderful haven, located within the Palace, in the heart of Paris, is convenient to visit when going to or coming from lunch at Willi's Wine Bar. The specialty shops in the arcade surrounding the park, selling toy soldiers, old medals, and other esoteric items are fun to visit. And it seems to have become a venue for changing exhibits of contemporary sculpture, which is always interesting. Métro Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre.

These parks aren't so centrally located, but if you have the time and inclination, are worth a visit:

Parc de Bagatelle

Located in the Bois de Boulogne, this park is notable for its irises and rose garden. There are frequent special garden shows that are noted in Pariscope. We had an unforgettable visit here one early April when thousands of tulips and daffodils were in flower along with an exhibit of exotic bulbs. Métro Les Sablons.

Parc de Belleville

This small (11 acres) park is a recent discovery for us. There are tiered gardens and from the top an outstanding view of Paris. Enter from Passage Julien-Lacroix. Métro Couronnes .

Parc Montsouris

Not as elegant as Monceau but a very pleasant 50-acre park with a lake, waterfall, and a nice place to walk. There are about five small streets directly west of the park that are interesting to explore; they are well marked in the Michelin 56 map on page 68, and several still have cobblestones. Numerous artists came to paint in this area and lived on these streets. Georges Braque

lived on a street now called rue Georges Braque. My favorite street is one called "Square de Montsouris." RER Cité Universitaire.

Parc des Buttes Chaumont

This Park holds a special place in our hearts because we remember it from our travels to Paris in the '60s. The images of older ladies sitting on the benches giving their caged birds an "airing" will always remain when we visit this place. It is a large park, quite hilly, an ex-quarry for much of the building materials for Baron Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris. A lake with two bridges leading to it has wonderful views of Montmartre and Sacré-Coeur. At our last visit a lot of construction marred its beauty and serenity, but I am sure that must be finished by now. Métro Buttes Chaumont or Botzaris.

Parc André-Citroën

It would definitely be a stretch to say that this is a beautiful park, but it is worth visiting because it is interesting to see what a new and futuristic park looks like in Paris. It is definitely "far out." We returned here in November 2003 for the first time since the park was in its early years. Although the trees and plants had matured, it seemed that it was in a state of some neglect. Also the fountains were not operating. Haven't been back since, so if you go, let me know its current state. Métro Balard or Javel.

Other lovely walks:

Canal St-Martin

This waterway which still has barge traffic goes from La Villette (where it connects to another canal) to Paris Arsenal at the Bastille where you look down on it from the Métro station. It disappears and goes underground at the intersection of Boulevard Jules Ferry and rue du Faubourg du Temple before resurfacing at the Bastille. The tree lined canal with its iron walkways can be a very pleasant walk, and you are likely to see boats going through the various locks along the length of the canal. Métro République or Boncourt.

Cimetière Père-Lachaise

Not quite a park or a garden, but the largest cemetery in Paris with 40 hectares (100 acres) and 3,000 trees. It is a very attractive setting for an interesting walk. The most often visited tomb is that of rock musician Jim Morrison, and there are many famous persons here. Maps showing the location of the most famous figures are readily available at the entrance across from the Gambetta Métro station.

Cimetière du Montparnasse

Smaller than Père-Lachaise, but many famous people are buried here and there are a lot of large trees so it also makes for an interesting walk. Maps showing the location of the celebrities are readily available. We usually go to one of these cemeteries on November 1 which is a holiday in France honoring the dead. Families and individuals bring many flowers for the tombs so it is a very colorful time to visit. Métro Raspail.

Paris Walking Tours

In 1994 an English couple, Peter and Oriel Caine started Paris Walking Tours, a company that features walking tours of Paris in English. We have been taking their tours regularly since they started. Until around 2000, all the tours were led by the Caines, but in 2001 they evidently expanded, and four subsequent tours we took were led by others. The guides had a very good knowledge of their subject and maintained the high standard we had come to expect. They have tours of the Marais, Montmartre, Les Halles, Art Nouveau in the 16th, and many others. One particularly good one was the tour of the 19th century rooms of the Musée Carnavalet that, for the first time, gave us a good understanding how 19th century Paris came to exist. Although we spend a great amount of time walking we have gained an expanded awareness, even of areas we thought we knew, when a guide has blended history with anecdotes and pointed out details. Their website at www.paris-walks.com gives details and scheduled tours for the coming month. We have enjoyed every one of the tours we have taken and have learned a great deal about the history of Paris. This is an absolutely delightful way to spend two hours, and we recommend it very highly. Phone 01-48-09-21-40 for up to date information of the tours that are being offered.