

PARIS & THE HEART OF FRANCE

Notes for travel by Steve Smith

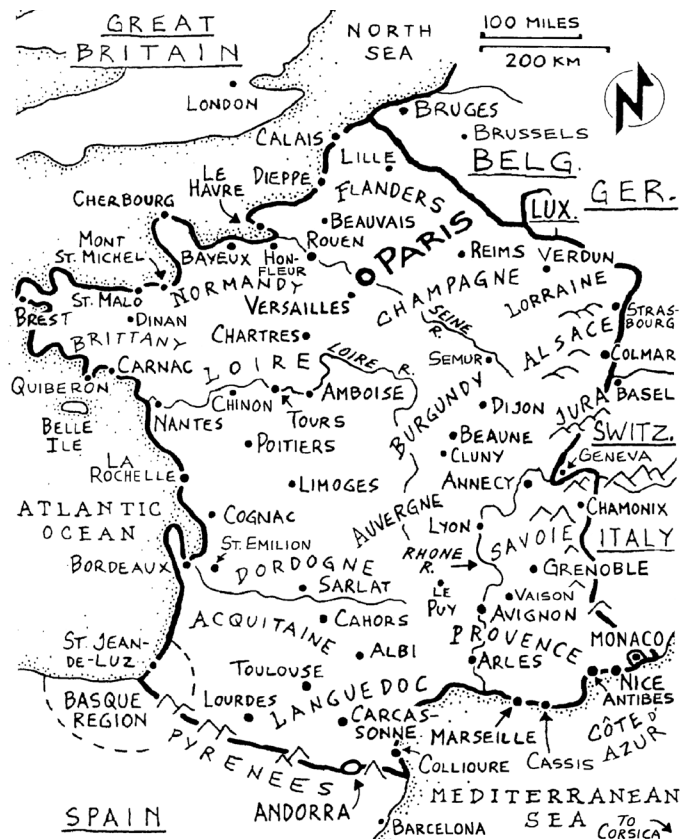
INTRODUCTION

- **Variety:** France offers Europe's greatest variety of scenery and culture.
- **Pace:** slow down! Spend 2-3 nights per stop and more time in fewer regions.
- **Trains** are convenient. Passes= good value, TGV is fast, need reservation, most other trains do not.
- **Minivan day tours** allow access to hard to get to places like D-Day beaches, Loire châteaux, Dordogne caves etc. (figure \$30-100 per person).
- **Car** offers best flexibility and is ideal for this rural country (outside Paris). Rent in USA—unlimited mileage is best, use a travel agent and consider lease option for longer trips (17 days or more).
- **Hotels:** avg. price for double room: 1 star= €75; 2 star= €95; 3 star= €135 (add 30% more for Paris). B&B's (Chambres d'Hôte) average €75 per room, cheap chain hotels average €50-65 per room.
- **Eating out:** allow €50 per person/day for 3 meals. Tipping is optional.
- **Total Daily Expenses**= €155 or about \$200 per person for two traveling together (€25-transportation; €65-hotel; €50-food; €15-sights).
- **Book well ahead:** hotels in Paris (anytime), Riviera and Alps (summer), Eiffel Tower and D-Day guide (anytime).

PARIS

Setting Up in Paris

- **From airports** (taxi, bus, metro, airport shuttle run by Air France, Roissy bus... don't use private airport shuttles to get you from the airport, to is okay.)
- **Subway** (Le Metro, buy a carnet of 10 tickets (€12), skip passes unless you'll be in Paris for more than 3 days—then get a Navigo Pass.
- **Buses and taxis** are also handy for getting around Paris. Don't hesitate to make use of them (allow ~€15 for average taxi ride within Paris).
- **Theft** (be careful out there, thieves thrive mostly on metro—no wallets in pockets nor purses over one shoulder).
- **Museum pass** (a good value for most, covers most key sights and allows you to go to front of line, buy at airport, first museum or major metro stop: 2 day €39; 4 consecutive days €54; 6 consecutive days €69).
- **Audio tours:** Rick Steves and others.



- **Organized tours:** Bus and boat tours of Paris, and guided walks of neighborhoods and museums can be good even for independent types. Several companies offer big bus or minivan excursions to nearby sights like Versailles, Giverny, even to Mt St Michel.

Best Five Days in Paris

- Day 1: Historic walk and Latin Quarter:** Visit Notre Dame (climb the tower), Ste Chapelle (the zenith of gothic architecture, stained glass), stroll the Latin Quarter and tour the Cluny Museum.
- Day 2: Louvre and Champs Elysées:** Visit the Louvre museum (arrive early or late to avoid crowds, consider a guided tour), then subway to the Arc de Triomphe (climb it for views), then walk down the Champs-Elysees.
- Day 3: Impressionist Paris:** Walking tour of Montmartre (where artists lived), then tour Orsay and Rodin or Orangerie museums.
- Day 4: Marais Area:** Carnavalet, Picasso, Pompidou Center and/or the Jewish Art and History Museums. Lunch on rue des Rosiers then Carnavalet, and evening dinner on the Ile St. Louis.
- Day 5: Eiffel Tower Area:** Eiffel Tower, rue Cler market street, Napoleon's Tomb and Army Museums.

DAY TRIPS FROM PARIS

- **Versailles** (easiest day trip, 25 mins from Paris, covered with museum pass, crowds are a problem. Consider sleeping here—the town is pleasant and hotels are less than in Paris).
- **Giverny** (1.5 hours by train/bus or taxi from St Lazare station. Monet's home and gardens where he spent last 40 years, arrive early or better, late to avoid crowds, or sleep here).
- **Reims** (45 mins by train). Champagne cellars, vibrant city and historic cathedral.
- **Chartres** (1 hour by train from Montparnasse station). Key sight is cathedral and Malcolm Miller tours, though town of Chartres makes a pleasant Paris escape, or last night in France (near Orly airport).
- **Fontainebleau and Vaux le Vicomte** (an hour by train south of Paris). Brilliant châteaux—if you're not going to the Loire.

NORMANDY (2-3 DAYS)

- **Honfleur:** ideal village for getting over jet lag. Visit Boudin and Satie Museums, savor the harbor.
- **D-Day beaches:** Arromanches' artificial harbor, American cemetery, Pointe du Hoc, walk on beach (sleep in Arromanches). Hire a guide but book well in advance for private guide.
- **Mont St Michel:** island abbey, arrive after 5:00, tour abbey, new parking and shuttle system, best at night (sleep here then leave early).

LOIRE VALLEY (2 DAYS)

- **Castles and palaces** are your focus.
- **Amboise or Chinon** areas make the best home bases—depends on castles you choose to visit.
- **Château de Chenonceau:** greatest of Loire châteaux, arrive before 9:00, near Amboise.
- **Château de Chambord:** biggest of Loire châteaux, 1 hour from Amboise, 440 room hunting lodge.
- **Château de Cheverny's** hunting dogs.
- **Château de Villandry's** brilliant gardens.
- **Château de Azay le Rideau** (best at night).

BURGUNDY (2 DAYS)

- **Highlights** are wine/food, hilltowns & abbeys.
- **Beaune:** best Burgundy base, Hospice de Beaune medieval hospital.
- **Bike ride:** through vineyards to villages and wineries, easy to rent bike in Beaune.
- **Near Beaune:** La Rochepot castle, Guedelon medieval castle under construction, Alésia Museum.

ALPS (2-3 DAYS)

- **Annecy:** dazzling lakefront city, lake steamer, lovely old city, bike path along lake (ride bike one way, take it on boat back).
- **Chamonix:** surrounded by high Alps. Take gondola up Mt Blanc and over to Italy, many lifts and hiking, summer luge, eat fondue.

LEARN MORE

Read: *Rick Steves' France, Rick Steves' Paris, Rick Steves' Pocket Paris, Rick Steves' Provence & the French Riviera, Rick Steves' French Phrase Book & Dictionary*

Watch: *Rick Steves' France Blu-ray/DVD*

Listen: *Travel with Rick Steves radio podcast archives at ricksteves.com*

Tour: *Paris & the Heart of France in 11 Days, Best of Paris in 7 Days, Loire to the South of France in 13 Days, Best of Eastern France in 14 Days, Best of Basque Country of Spain & France in 9 Days*

App: *Rick Steves' Audio Europe — Free audio tours and radio features organized in geographic playlists, for iPhone and Android*

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