

‘We’ll always have Paris’ says Roger Wheeler

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When Rick said this to Ilsa in *Casablanca*, no one realised that it would become one of the most famous lines of all time from a film.



Notre-Dame de Paris

SO 76 years after the movie, we still, occasionally, gaze at each other and quote ‘the’ line, these days expressed with humour rather than deep passion.

Let’s go to Paris for Christmas?, said my beloved, Mais Oui?, said I. So we went.

Eurostar is just a train like any other except that it takes over an hour to get on board, never mind about passport control, it’s all automatic anyway. The main problem was the size and amount of luggage people were taking, all of which had to go through security scanners, some cases were as big as the owners and that’s saying something.

The trains were all fully booked, as it was Christmas we upgraded to Standard Premier, just as well, we had big comfy seats, lunch and drinks. Seasoned travellers as we are, on arrival at Gare du Nord we grabbed the first taxi and got royally ripped off. 35€ for a 10€ journey, only ever use a taxi with a green Parisienne Taxi sign, we knew that didn’t we?

Paris is a beautiful city at any time with thousands of tourists from the Far East and assorted US citizens. The French don’t really ‘do’ Christmas, they put a few lights up and adorn some of the more famous buildings with some glitter but apart from that not a lot happens. Christmas Day is just like any Sunday, everything is running as normal except the museums are closed, as it can take about three hours queuing to get in to most of them we gave them a miss anyway.

We checked into a rather unusual hotel in the Marais, quite nice but nothing to write home about so I won't. It was called *Les Jardins du Marais* since you ask.



Sacre Coeur

Up to the **Sacre Coeur** on Christmas Day, we felt that we should, just to get trampled and shoved by our oriental chums. The weather was brilliant and we did get a fleeting glimpse of the view, we'd seen it before anyway. To be fair, if you have never been to Paris this is a spectacular view on a beautiful day, if you can handle the crowds, it's worth a visit.

As this was hardly our first visit to Paris so why did we bother to go see the other famous sites but we did anyway, so Eiffel Tower ✓ Place de la Concorde ✓ the Louvre ✓ the Champs Elysees ✓ etc, still there and still the same. But no sign of any yellow jackets, everything was very clean and tidy.



Centre Pompidou

We did visit the Centre Pompidou with some quite expensive advance tickets, if you like very modern art then this is for you. With over 100,000 works, the collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne make up one of the world's leading references for art of the 20th and 21st centuries. The building was regarded as quite bizarre in 1977, all very brutalist, but nowadays, with Frank Gehry and others, there is no real shock. The view from the top offers spectacular views of the city.

During our visit we also took a dinner cruise on the Bateaux Mouches. Never done that before, it's for tourists we thought, but so are we, so we went. Not cheap, in fact quite expensive at 150€ each, it was Christmas after all. This was a complete surprise; in fact quite brilliant, amazing food and wine, incredible staff and a lovely trip right along the river. Seeing Paris by night from the boat was really very lovely and dare I say, quite romantic, my cynicism took a few hours off.

Paris can just mean shopping to some and of course Les Grands Magasins should be visited if only for the incredible Christmas decorations, there are some. Once again we were almost trampled underfoot by sharp elbowed tourists, we didn't stay long. Here again if you go right up to the roof you get to see all of Paris, this time for free.

This is a city to walk around, but it was cold so we used the metro, buying a 'carnet' of 10 at a time saves money, at just 1.9 Euros per trip it's a bargain and you can go all over the city. Tickets are available at every metro station, the machines work and are in English.

We did take an unanticipated stroll down Boulevard St Germain through the famous Latin Quarter which is stuffed with incredibly expensive boutiques and fascinating cafes as well the Sorbonne University and the Jardin du Luxembourg, but not much to see there in December.



Mike and Roger cruise on the Bateaux Mouches



Eiffel Tower

So yes we will always have Paris, next time it will be in the summer when all the residents are away and its only tourists. Wonderful!

Top 5 must sees in Paris

- ◆ **Sacre Coeur and Montmartre** (www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/english/)
- ◆ **Eiffel Tower**, passing the famous flame on the Pont de l'Alma (www.toureiffel.paris/en)
- ◆ **Notre-Dame de Paris** and Ile de la Cité (www.notredamedeparis.fr/en)
- ◆ Champs-Élysées and **Arc de Triomphe** (www.paris-arc-de-triomphe.fr/en)
- ◆ **Louvre and Louvre Pyramid** (www.paris-arc-de-triomphe.fr/en)

You can travel to Paris in just two hours fifteen minutes on **Eurostar** from St Pancras International station in London, or pick it up at Ebbsfleet International and Ashford International in Kent. **EasyJet** fly direct from Gatwick to Charles de Gaulle airport.