

Things to do in France

By Ross Clarke

Photography by Pierre Ogeron / Getty



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It's not without good reason that we have a romanticised idea of France, with its picture-postcard villages, swathes of rolling countryside, quaint cafés and glorious coastlines. But from Paris to Montpellier and Lyon to Bordeaux, France is also bustling with creative modernity in everything from food to fashion.

What to see...

Classic

No matter how many pictures you see of the Eiffel Tower, there's nothing quite like being up close to

No matter how many pictures you see of the [Eiffel Tower](#), there's nothing quite like being up close to the 'iron lady' of Paris. Get off at the Trocadéro metro stop for the best picture from a distance. If you're looking to avoid the queue for the lift (and are feeling energetic), try climbing the steps to the second level – the camera-ready views are great all the way up.

Sometimes even the most patient traveller can turn into a right Mona Lisa when they're faced by big queues. For this reason we recommend heading to the [Louvre](#) during lunch time, when things are less crowded. Head to the Porte des Lions entrance, which tends to be quieter than the Pyramid – but do check opening times before you go.



If you're in France's Provence region, don't miss stocking up on the local Banon goat's cheese. The sweet yet strong cheese is distinctly wrapped in chestnut leaves and tied with raffia

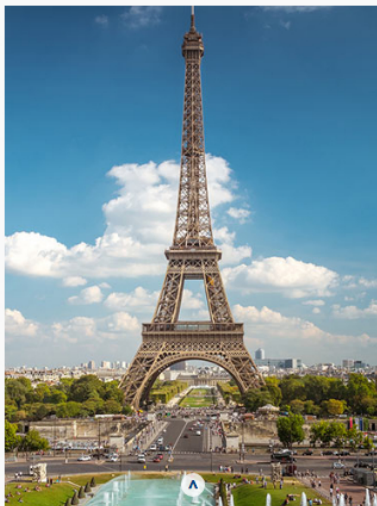
Curious

Imagine collecting pebbles on your post round every day and using them to construct an enormous elaborate castle. That's exactly what Ferdinand Cheval did back in the 1800s and his masterpiece – [Postman Cheval's Palais Idéal](#) – is still standing today in Hauterives (just an hour's drive south of Lyon).

[Discover our cheapest fares to Lyon](#)



French fancies: don't miss sampling chocolate éclairs in Paris © Jan Tyler / Getty



France's iron lady, the Eiffel Tower, is one of the most visited monuments in the world © naibank / Getty Images



The grand lobby of Paris' Banke Hotel in the Opéra district

Where to eat and drink...

[Bouchon Le Jura, Paris](#)

Originally opened in 1867, this family-run café-cum-restaurant serving up traditional French fare (think andouillette sausages in Beaujolais sauce or creamy-smooth chicken liver terrine) is somewhat of a Lyon institution. Head over at lunch, when you can get a plat du jour for just €13.

Where? 25 Rue Tupin, Lyon (+33 4 78 42 20 57; bouchonlejura.fr)

Nearest Metro: Line A to Cordeliers Bourse

Café des Deux Moulins, Lyon

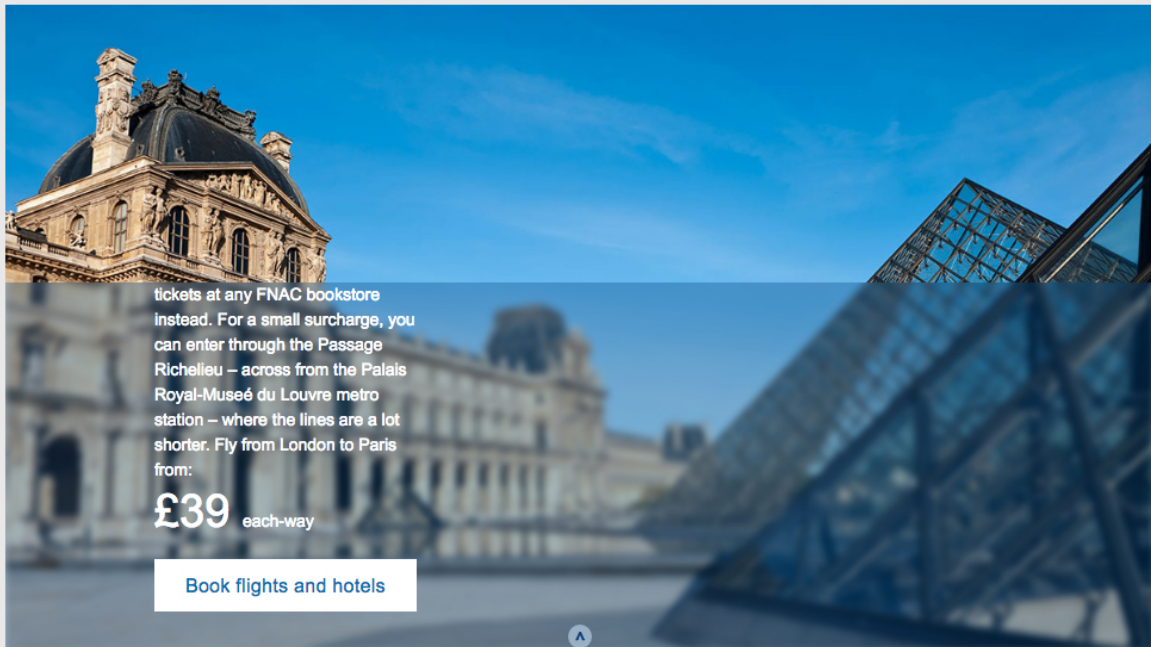
Famous for featuring in the cult-classic film *Amélie*, this café still retains its neighbourhood feel, nestled in the heart of Montmartre, offering everything from coffee and dessert to steak and lamb mains plates.

Where? 15 Rue Lepic, Paris (+33 1 42549050; cafedesdeuxmoulins.fr)

Nearest Metro: Line 2 to Blanche

Try it everywhere...

Eclairs – choux finger buns filled with patisserie cream. Paris' [Stohrer](#) is one of our favourite spots to sample them.



tickets at any FNAC bookstore instead. For a small surcharge, you can enter through the Passage Richelieu – across from the Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre metro station – where the lines are a lot shorter. Fly from London to Paris from:

£39 each-way

[Book flights and hotels](#)

The Louvre in Paris is home of the Mona Lisa – and the world's most visited museum

Where to stay...

City: [Banke Hotel](#)

As the name suggests, this five-star gem in the Opéra area of Paris is housed in a former bank building of the Belle Époque era, and is just a stone's throw from the famous Palais Garnier.

[Book a stay at Banke Paris](#)

Beach: [HI Hotel Eco Spa and Beach](#)

Situated 200 metres from Nice's beautiful esplanade seafront, this chic hotel has it's own private beach, rooftop pool and Turkish hammam.

[Book a stay at HI Hotel Eco Spa and Beach](#)

Where to shop...

Just a few steps from the Sacre Coeur and Moulin Rouge you'll come across the Paris Saint-Ouen flea market, which is full to the brim with old books, jewellery, clothes and bric-a-brac. To shop until you drop on high-street names, take a stroll down Rue Saint-Catherine in Bordeaux – it has nearly 3km of shop windows to peer into.

If you only buy one thing...

Cheese. If you're in the Provence region, don't miss the local food markets that take place most days and stock up on the local Banon goat's cheese. The sweet yet strong cheese is distinctly wrapped in chestnut leaves and tied with raffia.

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