

Sex and Death in Paris:

# Two Days in the French Capital

Coiffed, buffed and looking like a million euros, Paris wears its moniker as the world's most romantic city with nonchalant ease. But dig a little deeper and you uncover a darker side to the grand old dame – a city where the executioner's axe swings, odoriferous streams bubble deep underground and cancan dancers kick up their stocking-clad legs night after night after night.

## BENEATH THE CITY

After breakfast of tarts and coffee at **Jean Millet** (103 rue St-Dominique), what better way to start the day than a visit to the **Musée des Égouts de Paris**? The Paris Sewers Museum (place de la Résistance; opens at 11am) is a working museum whose entrance – a rectangular maintenance hole topped with a kiosk – is across the street from 93 quai d'Orsay. Raw sewage flows beneath your feet as you walk through 480m of malodorous tunnels, passing artefacts illustrating the development of Paris' waste-water disposal system. It'll take your breath away, it will.

To clear your head, meander south to the **Musée Rodin** (77 rue de Varenne; [www.musee-rodin.fr](http://www.musee-rodin.fr)). The museum contains casts of some of Rodin's most celebrated works, including that perennial crowd-pleaser *The Thinker* and the romance-hewn-in-marble of *The Kiss*.

You'll deserve lunch once you've tracked down **Dix Vins** (57 rue Falguière, shut Sunday; [www.le-dix-vins.com](http://www.le-dix-vins.com); ☎ 01 43 20 91 77), a tiny restaurant hidden away on the far side of Montparnasse with a fantastic wine list and unique set menu.

To the east is the **Cimetière du Montparnasse** (blvd Edgar Quinet & rue Froidevaux), which received its first lodger in 1824. It contains the tombs of such illustrious

personages as Charles Baudelaire, Guy de Maupassant, Samuel Beckett, Man Ray, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and the crooner Serge Gainsbourg. Get a map showing the location of the tombs from the entrance.

Heading further east, pop in for a pastis at **La Closerie des Lilas** (171 blvd du Montparnasse). As Hemingway fans will know, what is now the American Bar here is where Papa did a lot of writing, drinking and eating of oysters.

The last stop of the day is the most macabre place in the city. In 1785, it was decided to solve the problems posed by Paris' overflowing cemeteries by exhuming the bones and storing them in the tunnels of three disused quarries. One such ossuary is the **Catacombs** (1 place Denfert Rochereau). After descending 130 steps from street level, you follow 1.6km of underground corridors in which the bones and skulls of millions of Parisians are neatly stacked along the walls. Nice.

For the rest of the evening, settle down for a bit of cancan. For ambitious sets and lavish costumes, try **Le Lido de Paris** (116bis av des Champs-Élysées; [www.lido.fr](http://www.lido.fr)), which was founded at the close of World War Two. Dinner, drinks and the show cost €140-200.

If cancan is a big no-no, head instead to the Bastille area – have dinner at one of the neighbourhood restaurants (rue de Lappe is a good place to start) and follow up with a few drinks at kitsch-heaven **Le Lèche-Vin** (13 rue Daval).

## LOSING YOUR HEAD

After breakfast in your hotel, cross the Seine to the Île de la Cité and the **Conciergerie** (2 blvd du Palais). Built

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in the 14th century, this was the main prison during the Reign of Terror and was used to incarcerate alleged enemies of the Revolution before they were brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal in the Palais de Justice next door. Among the 2700 prisoners held here were Queen Marie-Antoinette and, as the Revolution began to turn on its own, the Revolutionary radicals Danton and Robespierre.

To see where the prisoners ended up, stroll north to the **Place de la Concorde**. In 1793, Louis XVI's head was lopped off by a guillotine set up in the northwest corner of the square. During the next two years, another guillotine – this one near the entrance to the Jardin des Tuileries – was used to behead 1343 more people, including Marie-Antoinette, Danton and Robespierre.

For lunch, catch the métro to Pigalle and tuck into the regional cuisine at **Relais Gascon** (6 rue de Abbesses). Once satisfied, it's time to explore a different kind of appetite at the **Musée de l'Érotisme** (72 blvd de Clichy; [www.musee-erotisme.com](http://www.musee-erotisme.com)). The Museum of Erotic Art puts 2000 titillating statues, stimulating sexual aids and fetishist items on a loftier plane, with erotic art both antique and modern from four continents spread over seven floors. Some of the works are certainly, well, instructive.

If you haven't yet had your fill of tombs, spend a couple of hours with the likes of Zola, Stendhal and Degas at the **Cimetière de Montmartre**. Alternatively, explore the northern part of the arrondissement. The lights of the Moulin Rouge dominate boulevard de Clichy and only a few blocks southeast is lively, neon-lit place Pigalle, one of Paris' two main sex districts.

As night falls, catch the métro to Les Halles and slide into **Tana** (36 rue Tiquetonne). Customers are immediately plunged into a highly exotic world where

the extravagance of the 'hostesses' is equal to the Thai dishes on offer. It's an experience you'll never quite forget...

## Sleeping

### Budget:

Hôtel Eldorado ([eldoradohotel@wanadoo.fr](mailto:eldoradohotel@wanadoo.fr); ☎ 01 45 22 35 21) Boho place with colourfully decorated rooms on a quiet street.

### Midrange:

Hôtel Caron de Beaumarchais ([www.carondebeaumarchais.com](http://www.carondebeaumarchais.com); ☎ 01 42 72 34 12) Award-winning hotel decorated like an 18th-century private house.

### Top End:

Murano Urban Resort ([www.muranoresort.com](http://www.muranoresort.com); ☎ 01 42 71 20 00) Twenty-first-century interior meets 19th-century exterior and our only response is 'wow'.

For more reviews of Paris accommodation, check out the Sleep section on [www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation).

By Amanda Canning

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