

THE POWER OF TEN... GREAT FOOD EXPERIENCES IN

Paris

As somebody whose business is taking people on food tours, I naturally gravitate toward a new one every time I go to Paris. The city is, of course, one of the world's premier gastronomic destinations, so the choices it offers for culinary activities are practically limitless. Here are my favourites (for now). Take these 10 suggestions and use them as a launching pad for discovering your own culinary Paris. Bon voyage and bon appétit!

1. Splurge (but save) at lunch. If you've dreamed of dinner under the stars of a Michelin-rated restaurant but turn queasy at the price dangling from those stars, perhaps lunch, while still a splurge, will allow you the savings you



need to savour suavely. The **Jules Verne**, a one-star Michelin restaurant run by Alain Ducasse, located in the lofty beams of the Eiffel Tower, was my test of this theory. My sister and her wallet proved to be good sports about this 350 Euro experiment (CDN \$464). Giddy as schoolgirls, we bypassed the Tower's throngs and went straight to the Jules Verne logo to ride our private elevator 125 metres to the restaurant with its 360-degree view of Paris. The seating was plush leather, the linens crisp, the service smooth and the food masterful. Fresh White Asparagus and Langoustine Salad, Coquilles St Jacques, and a Grand Marnier Soufflé straight from cookery heaven were delightful. But best of all were the unexpected treats – the *amuse bouche*, a glass of Puligny-Montrachet served deftly from a magnum, palate-cleansing sorbets and no less than five sumptuous *Petites-Fours* to finish with coffee, conversation and small reality-checking pinches. Once in awhile you have to obey the urge to splurge.

2. Spend a day in the life of real Parisian gourmets. **Aurélie Mahoudeau and Marion Willard** are everything you imagine Parisians to be – charming, friendly and excellent cooks. My sister and I met them for a mid-morning coffee and then slipped around the corner onto **Rue de Levis** to shop along one of the nicest market streets in Paris. We hunted and gathered, tried and tasted until we had the makings of a seasonally apropos lunch. Around another corner and up a few flights of stairs we settled into the cheery kitchen of Aurélie's chic apartment. Lardon and shallot madeleines with champagne, a spring salad of lentils, radishes and peas, guinea fowl in a hazelnut and parsley sauce, potatoes fried in duck fat, three kinds of cheese with fresh bread, and a fresh, rustic strawberry tart with chantilly cream kept us busy cooking, talking, laughing and sipping a Côte du Rhône until four o'clock. You can visit Paris a hundred times and never get this close to real Parisians, or you can go to **succulent-paris.com** and book an intimate day with Aurélie and Marion.



3. Eat at a Michelin-starred chef's "lesser" restaurant. **Joël Robuchon** is a star-studded Michelin chef who is so confident in the demand for his main attractions – his 12 restaurants worldwide that, between them, wear 26 Michelin stars – that he "benevolently" opened **L'Atelier** (The Workshop). There, for much



more reasonable prices than you'll find at his Michelin-starred restaurants, you can enjoy the same quality food in a more casual setting. A sleek bar surrounds the open kitchen in a room whose dramatic décor is black and red. My sister and I spent the evening watching the cooking elves in this workshop do their magic to showcase food as edible art, while enjoying service that is as perfect as the food. The bill, a mere 150 Euros (CDN \$198) for three courses with wine and coffee, was a veritable bargain after the Jules Verne lunch.

4. Shop for food in the 6th. The 6th arrondissement (district) is posh. The **Boulevard Raspail Market** on a Tuesday morning sees *les tres chic* get their *fixe* of fresh. Poilâne bakes their daily bread, Le Grand Epicerie sees that they get the prettiest food of every description. If you walk as much as a Parisian you can eat like one, so stroll this section of the *rive gauche* and get lost in lusciousness.



5. Visit the world's largest food market. I dragged myself around the hallowed halls of **Rungis Market** with guide Isobel Bachelard in the wee hours of the morning in the spring of 2006. Bachelard's partner, Stephanie Curtis, is still amazing tourists with the sights, smells and tastes of this food connoisseur's dream – 150 hectares of the best food the world has to offer. Email **stephanie@piro-curtis.info** for information.

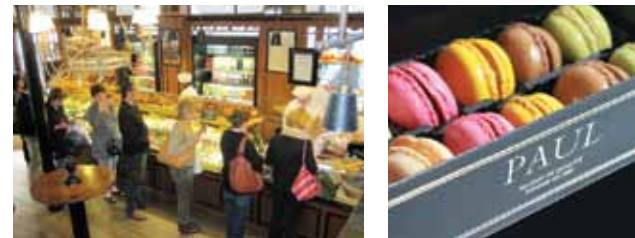
6. Investigate the history of Les Halles and shop at E. Dehillerin. *The Belly of Paris*, by Emile Zola, is a great read for food lovers going to Paris. It chronicles the rise of French Revolutionaries from Paris's original food market, **Les Halles**. Zola's descriptions of the lives of that time always lead me on an obligatory stroll around the former "belly of Paris," imagining how it must have



been. Since I am in the neighbourhood, I pop into **E. Dehillerin** to drool over the copper pots. The kitchen store, nearly 200 years old, has been there since Les Halles was a market – from 1183 to 1971! – and Julia Child shopped there when she lived in Paris.

7. Take the train to Versailles on a Sunday. Sunday is the day to go to **Versailles**. It's the only day the fountains and music are turned on in the gardens. Arrive mid-morning and walk the few blocks from the train station to the weekly farmer's market. Pick up a fresh baguette and some cheeses, stuff them in your backpack, tour the palace, and then stroll to the far end of the canal to feast on, and in, the surreal setting.

8. Buy a croque monsieur from a street vendor. Near Luxembourg gardens you will find street vendors serving these ubiquitous **ham and gruyère cheese sandwiches**. Worried you won't find one? Pinch a baguette, some ham, cheese and a little fruit from the morning buffet at your hotel and you have a



portable picnic that you can upgrade with a few sweets from **Paul**, Paris's most affordable high quality bakery and café. (Tip: Take gifts of Paul's prettily packaged macarons back home.)

9. Invoke "André's Rule". My friend André Savoie, poor dear, has had to visit Paris several times a year for many years. He let me in on a secret that I have used to great success, so I call it "André's Rule." Whenever he dined with Parisian friends, they would meet for a drink at a chic bar in a well-known "touristy" district, but then they invariably walked a few blocks away to a different neighbourhood to dine at a locals' bistro. I have discovered that with each block you wander away from a chic bar neighborhood, the price of dining goes down, and the number of locals goes up. Try following André's Rule on your next trip.

10. Let an afternoon or night "sip" away. **Place Saint-Michel** is the hub of Left Bank student activity. Claim a seat, order a carafe of house wine, and sip a people-watching afternoon away at one of the sidewalk cafés. Once you have a seat, you'll never be asked to leave – it's a defining principle of café life. If the night is the only time you have to slow down, then take the elevator to the panoramic bar on the 33rd floor of the **Hotel Concorde La Fayette**. Order the 18 Euro (CDN \$25) glass of champagne and you'll receive a bowl of bar mix and an unparalleled view of the nightly Eiffel Tower light show while letting the night "sip away" in this glorious City of Lights.

Karen Anderson owns Calgary Food Tours. She manages to actually lose a few pounds on every visit to Paris despite taking food tours.