



Rooms like this at the Jardins du Marais look out into the hotel's beautiful courtyard.

Paris: Part I

Where to stay, how to navigate the city and some live entertainment

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PARIS, FRANCE - Exactly 28 years after my last visit to Paris, I recently soaked up the experience again of the French capital with all it has to offer. We began planning for this trip to the City of Lights seven months earlier by booking flights and hotels. That was followed by the rigorous process of trying to fit an endless array of activities into only six full days. Websites like <http://en.parisinfo.com/discovering-paris> and www.rendezvousenfrance.com, which via its Atout France French government Tourism Office in Montreal, served as a big help. So was any human being I knew who has ever been there.

When you are in Paris for a week, you cannot do everything so one must prioritize when planning and be prepared to

drop some intended activities if necessary. Here is part one of my series on Paris.

WHERE TO STAY

Seven months before we even left for France, we began the challenging task of looking for a hotel. Upon recommendations from friends we targeted Les Jardins du Marais (www.lesjardinsdumarais.com). Located only blocks away from the famous Marais district, this beautiful hotel has 263 rooms and suites, an intimate restaurant and bar and excellent customer service. It is part of the Preferred Hotel Group (www.preferredhotelgroup.com). It had a king size bed with a solid sliding door leading to a living room and a most comfortable sofa bed. We had an extra sink, microwave oven, a minibar/fridge, a dishwasher, a pantry cabinet, a stovetop burner, a hairdryer, a working desk, a

small table and very comfortable chair. The story of this hotel all began in 1987 when the owner was wandering through the oldest part of the city and discovered a little alleyway surrounded by buildings and studios home to famous sculptors and artists in the 1960s. He was instantly captivated by the place's quaint ambience and 18th and 19th century historic landmark exteriors. And so was hatched a wild idea to turn this magical place into a charming hotel so thousands of guests could enjoy the same dream.

Originally opened as the Home Plaza Bastille, this exclusive site was fully renovated in 2004, earned its fourth Michelin star and became Les Jardins du Marais. Your eyes will be astounded before you even reach the lobby. When you open the carriage doors to a mind-blowing display you will see the largest open-air hotel gardens in Paris. The

lobby extends to reveal a dramatic 1,500 square metre backdrop of courtyards and gardens. You can only reach this exclusive and exotic locale after crossing the extremely secluded threshold of 74 Rue Amelot.

Nestled in the heart of Paris, the hotel transcends you through time the moment you step inside. Innovative use of space and light tricks create an extraordinary setting that approaches intimate sophistication – this is the opposite of flashy opulence. The gardens are encircled by seven historic buildings with the 263 rooms. They include 86 Superior rooms and 120 Executive rooms that offer guests unparalleled tranquility in the middle of Paris.

Wi-fi is available in all rooms and common areas. There is a workout room and a grocery store moments away. The Saint Sébastien Froissart station on Line 8 of the metro is two min-

utes on foot from the hotel and it will lead you to any place you wish to go. Considered a leading tourist attraction in its own right, the Paris Metro system is absolutely superb and so easy to navigate.

LIVE PERFORMANCES

There are plenty of live stage performances in Paris. I recommend the world famous Moulin Rouge (www.moulinrouge.fr) and the Theatre Mogador (<http://www.stage-entertainment.fr/theatre-mogador>).

Established in 1889, the Moulin Rouge is quite simply the most famous cabaret in the world! Located in the Monmartre District, the room is magnificently decorated in belle époque style and red velvet, with typical burlesque frescoes. This is a wonderful place to enjoy gourmet French food by the Maison Dalloyau, served with champagne - the official drink of the cabaret. But show only options are also available and that is what we opted for. We did get a fresh bottle of bubbly to our table upon arrival. And what a show! This is a "can't miss" stop for any Paris visitor. You will be entertained by a troupe of 80 artists, including 60 Doriss Girls recruited world-wide; 1,000 costumes of feathers, rhinestones and sequins, made in the most famous Parisian workshops; sumptuous sets in shimmering colours, uniquely designed by Italian artists; and outstanding international acts. On the night we were in attendance, a male and female acrobatic team astounded the audience and there was also the most marvelous and humorous ventriloquist. When one of the dancers dropped into a swimming pool which emerged from the floor and began to swim with snakes, the packed room applauded loudly. This revue, called "Féerie," is performed twice a night. The dinner and show package starts at 7 p.m.: the first show at 9 and the second at 11. .

The Mogador Theatre is a performance venue of 1,600 seats located a few steps from Paris's department stores and Palais Garnier Opera House. It has a number of facilities for the comfort of the audience: lounges, foyers, bars, and eating areas. Since 2005, the place has been run by the Stage Entertainment group and the eclectic program favours musicals: The Lion King (1,300,000 spectators), Mamma Mia! (2011 and 2012), Sister Act (2013) and most recently the French version of Beauty and the Beast (La Belle et La Bête). We were fortunate to see one of the final shows of the latter's highly successful nine-month run. First of all, we of course knew the storyline already. However, coming from Montreal we had no trouble understanding the dialogue. I would recommend that every tourist – even those who do not understand French – check out one of their presentations. Chalk it up as a good cultural experience. The theatre itself is lovely and located near a lot of trendy places to eat. Next on the agenda will be Le Bal Des Vampires (<http://www.lebaldesvampires.fr>), starting in October. For Montrealers who do speak and understand French, it seemed logical for us to seek out a production en Français. Five spaces are reserved for individuals with mobility issues.



Performers at the Moulin Rouge.