

APRIL IN PARIS



*Fall in love with Paris
all over again—but this
time, bring your children
along for the journey*

By Susannah Herrada





Has your passport expired since you had kids? Are you in a Parisian-holiday holding pattern until they grow up? *Mais pourquoi* (but why)? Find a dog sitter, brush up on your French, and pack your bags *tout de suite* (at once)! With a little itinerary tweaking, you can make a trip to Paris a great kid-friendly experience. Traveling with the kids may require a slower pace, but you *can* turn your Parisian dreams into vacation reality while introducing the next generation to the rewards of international travel. We offer some tried and true tips on how to do just that.

CALIBRATE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.

Resist the temptation to rush from site to site. Think of the trip as a way to foment a desire to explore. An additional perk of bringing the kids: Children under age 18 do not pay admission for most museums and attractions (except the Eiffel Tower). Here are two additional savings options.

- **City passes**—Many travelers opt for city passes such as the Paris Museum Pass (provides free entry to more than 60 museums, monuments and galleries) or the Paris Pass, which covers museum fees in addition to extra attractions and the cost of public transportation, including the benefit of the hop-on/hop-off bus.
- **The Paris Métro**—Cut your fare expenses in half when you buy a money-saving *carnet* of 10 tickets for the Métro transit system, available in credit card/coin-only vending machines near the turnstiles.



BUY YOURSELF A LITTLE PEACE.

It's worth it to pay for a pleasant experience now and then. Here are a few places to splurge.

- **Book a centrally located hotel.** A more expensive hotel in the thick of things means you can regroup for an hour or two in the late afternoon. Paris' 20 arrondissements (neighborhoods) are numbered in a spiral, with Ile de la Cité, the island in the Seine, as the center. Focus on single-digit neighborhoods three through seven.
- **Splurge on a guide or tour.** Get the most out of attractions, including the Louvre, with a private guide specifically for families. Highly rated private museum tours through companies such as Paris Muse provide engaging tours at a kid-friendly pace, tailored to your interests. Try a chocolate tour with Meeting the French or a cooking class at Culinary Institute Lenôtre. Located conveniently just off the Champs-Elysées, Ecole Lenôtre offers a variety of youth (and adult) classes.
- **Rent audio guides.** Audio guides allow kids a more active role in learning about art. With a pair of earbuds and lanyard audio guide, kids can explore an exhibit at their own pace, typing in the number for a piece of art that piques their interest. For my youngest child, we brought along our earbud splitter and shared one audio guide, saving a few euros.
- **Take an escorted vacation.** A guided vacation includes most of your expenses in one upfront package price: family-friendly accommodations, all transportation, many meals, sightseeing admissions and audio guides. You may also receive perks such as front-of-the-line access, after-hours access and advance-purchase tickets at popular attractions, which translates into less wait time for restless little ones. Also, you won't have to worry about mapping out what to see and how to get there, or whether a certain museum is open the day you'll be in town. Escorted touring takes away those worries and replaces them with ease and convenience, allowing you to focus on the experience rather than the logistics. Specific tours for families often provide separate kids' activities to give parents a little downtime, too.



Sacred Heart Cathedral



Notre Dame Cathedral



CREATE A MUST-EXPERIENCE LIST.

Time to dismiss that American approach to fast food, fast lives and fast vacations. Instead of a checklist of places, decide on your desired outcomes, and prioritize them. Replace your must-see list with an outcome-based list.

• **Foster practical skills.** Not only are map reading and schedule deciphering part of most elementary school curriculums, but children's enthusiasm soars when they play tour guide. Get kids started with websites such as TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet or a printed guidebook and work together planning a route through the city or a museum.

• **Make lemons into citron pressé.** Cope gracefully with long lines and hotel-room mayhem by purchasing tickets in advance and entertaining kids with downloadable material such as Paris-themed audiobooks or podcasts. (See the sidebar for suggestions.)

• **Become Francophiles.** Enjoy a slower pace by limiting the itinerary to one big activity per day. Pass the remainder of the day at cafés and a few of Paris' 421 municipal gardens, which provide virtually endless opportunities for exploration. My kids still talk about pole boating in the Tuileries fountains and the Jardin du Luxembourg as their favorite Paris memories.

• **Become a student of culture.** Often the most authentic experiences in Paris are not planned. On any given day, a troupe or a one-man show sets up within sight of a quaint Parisian café, where you comfortably pass the time. Meander to the next café or park when the kids get squirrely, taking time to linger on bridges and walk along the Seine.

• **Create positive memories.** A pleasant day of touring pivots on interesting destinations with engaging routes at a relaxed pace. Why not take a spin around the city? Paris proudly boasts six strategically located carousels, making it easy to map out a route passing city sites. A visit to the Catacombs will surely make your child's "What I did this summer" essay, though this ossuary could be a little scary for younger travelers. Keep a sketchpad and colored pencils handy for quiet moments in churches, museums and parks to make your own souvenirs. Although the line for Notre Dame tours can be a long, there's rarely a wait to buy small bags of grain to feed the pigeons and sparrows.

• **Enjoy French cuisine.** Paris makes it effortless to find satisfying culinary experiences for all ages. Place your kids along a Paris street, and watch them ricochet like pinballs between vendors selling gelato, street crepes and fresh baguettes. For a bit more balanced diet, head to any of the 69 open-air markets or 13 covered markets scattered throughout the city on various days. Work up an appetite along Rue Montorgueil's market street (arrondissement two). Centrally located, this pedestrian street entices young and old with its flower vendors, rotisseries, fishmongers, bakers and fromagers. Enjoy an al fresco hot chocolate at Charles Chocolatier or pastries at elegant Stohrer, the oldest pastry shop in Paris.

• **Develop art appreciation.** Will the plane be cleared for take-off at Charles de Gaulle if a passenger fails to glimpse Mona Lisa's smile or puzzle at the modern mishmash at Centre Pompidou? You might not want to miss these, but keep the visits short (two to three hours), and consider hiring guides or renting audio guides.



FALL IN LOVE.

Kids are wonderful travel companions. Their naturally inquisitive nature brings a fresh perspective to a city. Until I went to Paris with my children, the City of Light failed to enchant me; perhaps it was the rush of trying to see too much in too little time. But when I went as a parent with young children, I had to slow my pace, and finally, the city washed over me. Immersing myself in Paris' pleasures through the eyes of my children, I succumbed to its magic and fell in love at last.

PRE-TRIP READING AND PLANNING FOR ALL AGES

Introduce the City of Light's art, history and culture through podcasts, audiobooks, literature and movies.

- **Literature:** *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Brian Selznick), *Mr. Chicken Goes to Paris* (Leigh Hobbs), *Minou* (Mindy Bingham), *Charlotte in Paris* (Joan MacPhail Knight), *The Mona Lisa Caper* (Rick Jacobson and Laura Fernandez)
- **Guide books:** AAA's *Europe TravelBook* (free to Premier members at your AAA Store), *Babar's Guide to Paris* (Laurent de Brunhoff), *Not-For-Parents Paris: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know* (Lonely Planet), *Monuments That Tell Stories of Paris* (Jean Daly), *Mission Paris: A Scavenger Hunt Adventure* (Catherine Aragon), *Kids' Travel Guide—Paris: Kids' enjoy the best of Paris* (Shira Halperin and FlyingKids)
- **Animated:** *Rugrats in Paris* (Nickelodeon), *Anastasia* (Fox Animation Studios), *Aristocats* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (both Disney), *A Monster in Paris* (Bibo Films), *A Cat in Paris* (Folimage)
- **On the big screen:** *The Pink Panther*, *An American in Paris*, *Funny Face*, *The Red Balloon* by Albert Lamorisse (video or book)
- **Podcasts:** Though not designed specifically for children, podcast series focusing on Paris provide background for all ages. Our go-to's include Rick Steves' Paris audio tour and Tourcaster Paris from LearnOutLoud.com. Bring a small Bluetooth speaker for the hotel room and an audio splitter for riding the bus and Métro and waiting in long lines.