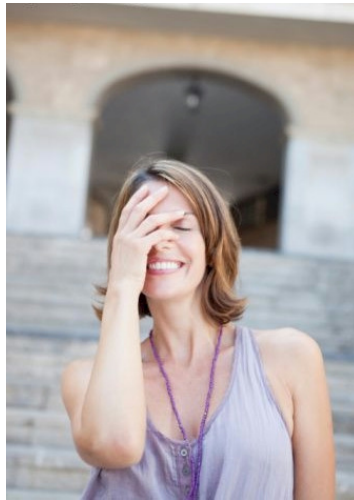




# 10 Mistakes Paris Visitors Must Avoid!



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## INTRODUCTION

Although Paris assuredly is the fairytale city that everyone claims, getting it wrong can dent the dream a little. Mistakes cost money, time and enjoyment. That's why it's good to know a few key tips and tricks on how to grapple with the particularities of the city of lights.

As a short-term Paris rental agency, A la carte Paris has accommodated several thousand English-speaking Paris visitors, over a period of 10 years. This accumulated experience and insider knowledge means you learn what mistakes get made and how to avoid them.

So here goes:

- **Mistake #1: Being insulted by a so-called rude Frenchman**

Whenever a swearing Englishman excuses himself with a "Pardon my French", I can't help but chuckle. The biggest stereotype about the French – their legendary rudeness - is also the most inaccurate, because the French are actually friendly and helpful. That said, there are cultural differences that can lead some to perceive the French as rude.

The key is simply to understand these differences and make a small effort to integrate. See, if you go to Paris without learning anything at all about French customs and social behaviour, then you will tend to behave in a way that the French perceive as extremely rude, and they will simply reflect that rudeness back at you, while you'll have no idea where it's coming from.

Here are some simple pointers:

- Walking up to a French person and speaking English right off the bat, under the assumption that English is spoken by everyone on Earth, is seen as rude and inconsiderate. Always attempt to speak at least a little token French. Simply saying "Bonjour! Parlez-vous Anglais?" (Pronounced bon-jouh, pah-lay voo ahn-glay). It simply means, "Hello, do you speak English?" and it makes a huge difference. Many French, who would otherwise ignore you and walk away, will suddenly speak fluent English if you just show a token effort at trying *their* language.
- Be sure to greet strangers (a simple "bonjour" is fine) before launching into other requests. In France, it is considered rude to just walk up and start talking like one does in America for example.
- Hush! The French are a somewhat low-key and hushed people, tending to talk softly - their voices don't carry in the streets, on the Metro, or even when they're sitting at the next table. Americans in particular tend to be far louder, speaking at a level as if oblivious to their neighbours or surroundings. This kind of extrovert behaviour is seen as very obnoxious by the French, so best make an effort to blend in by keeping your voice low.
- Americans and some other Anglo-Saxon cultures are very friendly when it comes to personal space. A French person on the other hand likes about 1 meter of space between him and the person he's talking to, otherwise he or she might perceive you as an invasive presence. Just stand back a little more than you might naturally.
- The French don't quite have the enthusiasm of Americans, and are more reserved. A French man or woman is far less likely than an American to break into a wide toothy grin each time they meet someone new. Furthermore, their service culture is far less

extrovert, with no “Hi, how can I help you today?” or “Have a nice day!” extroversion. Don’t think locals don’t like you or are being rude; they’re just more subdued.

- The more you know about (and imitate) french customs, the more you will be integrated and the less likely it is that you will be perceived as rude. Now that you know that the French are generally only rude when they reflect back perceived rudeness, you’ll find that a bit of education and knowledge will generally make the “rude French” vanish, replaced by a smiling, helpful and understanding people.

Oh, I should say that I feel there is an exception to the rule, though not everyone agrees with me on this. I am struck how surprisingly often French waiters appear quite rude (though this is perhaps mostly in the “trendier” Paris eateries, where the surliness seems almost deliberate). In these rarer cases, I fear that no amount of social skill on your behalf will get past that. Even their fellow compatriots think they’re rude. Best to just reframe their rudeness as a quirky local charm and smile at it. That’s what I do!

### ▪ **Mistake #2: Not speaking any French at all**

As touched upon above, it’s important that you do learn learn a few French words and phrases. Even if it's just a crash course on the flight over, and your delivery is less than perfect, the fact that you're trying will win points. Also, try to imagine how you might feel in your home town if a visiting stranger walked up you speaking French and expecting you to reply! You don't speak to foreigners in your country in their language do you? So don't expect the French to do it for you. The fact that they probably will - most Parisians speak a bit of English - doesn’t mean you should just *expect* them to.

You don't need to learn much, but you should certainly learn a few essentials. In French culture, it is considered rude and inconsiderate to not use the basic courtesy words and niceties of conversation. Struggling with pronunciation doesn’t matter; the effort will be appreciated!

Some basic words to learn:

- Hello - bonjour
- Do you speak English? - Parlez-vous Anglais?
- I speak English - Je parle anglais
- I don’t understand - Je ne comprends pas
- Yes – oui
- No - non
- Who? - Qui
- What? – Quoi?
- When? – Quand?
- Where? – Où?
- Why/Why not? – Pourquoi/Pourquoi pas?
- How? – Comment?
- How much is it? – C’est combien?
- Left / Right / Straight on– Gauche / Droite / Tout droit
- Sir/mister - monsieur

- Ma'am/madam/Mrs. - madame
- Miss - mademoiselle
- Man – homme
- Woman - femme
- Please - s'il vous plait
- Excuse me - pardon
- Thank you - merci
- Thank you very much - merci beaucoup
- Sorry - desolé
- You're welcome - de rien
- Goodbye - au revoir
- So long/until next time - à bientôt
- Until tomorrow – à demain
- Good morning / afternoon – bonjour
- Good evening - bonsoir
- Good night - bonne nuit
- Write it – écrivez le
- Show me - montrez-moi
- Repeat more slowly – Répétez plus lentement

### ▪ Mistake #3: Making a hash of your restaurant meal

Everyone knows that Paris is a great city for foodies, with a large choice of very good restaurants in every central Paris district (which is one of the reasons why ALL the apartment rentals offered by A La Carte Paris are in the most central locations).

Take advantage, but also take care not to mess your meal up by observing a few cultural tips.

- **Don't go too early:** A Parisian will never have dinner before 8pm, so going before then means that the restaurant will be devoid of atmosphere, which is a shame. If you can wait for 9pm then that's better still. If it's any comfort, the Spanish have dinner much later still...
- **Don't order *A la carte* (– except for your apartment rental! ;-):** unless you've got your eye on something specific, it's advisable to go for the fixed-price menu. These menus, grouping together starter and main course, or main course and desert, or all three, offer great value for money and usually have much of the best things included, so you won't be missing out either. The exception would be the "tourist menus" offered by some eateries. If you see the word tourist, simply walk away as the food will be bland and the prices high.
- **Don't order aperitif:** few people order "kir" anymore (refreshing white wine with a dash of cassis) and I fear this aperitif may have become distinctly unfashionable. In fact, Parisians don't usually go for an *apéro* at the restaurant, preferring instead to have a pre-dinner drink in a nearby café, perhaps on a terrace, before heading to the restaurant. So when the waiter asks, "*Vous desirez un apéritif?*", you certainly shouldn't feel obligated to say, "*Bien sûr!*", especially since a round of four will set you back at least 25€. Just decline politely with a "*Non merci*".

- **Don't fish for scallops:** the trick is to know that scallops are “Coquilles Saint Jacques”, or “Noix de Saint Jacques” when presented without their shells (even though there are no “noix” (nuts) in them!). So don't fall into the trap of ordering “Escalopes”, or you'll be presented with a few thin pieces of leathery veal (not bad in chewy-meat kind of way, but not the dewy salty spray of sea that you're seeking).
- **Don't ask for butter:** French butter, especially salted butter, is a real treat. Unfortunately however, you won't find it served with bread, except in some upscale restaurants. This is because bread is there as an accompaniment to a meal, not as a starter. That's why, if you can, you shouldn't even touch the bread before your meal arrives. When you do eat your bread, don't yank a bit off with your teeth; instead tear off a bite-sized piece and put it in your mouth. It's a question of table etiquette.
- **Don't turn off the tap:** although some find it hard to believe, the tap water in Paris is fine to drink and is actually quite nice. Bottled water is really just a waste of money and resources. It's actually pretty cool (it shows confidence) to ask for a “carafe d'eau” (don't say “eau du robinet” (tap water), which sounds weird), so don't be intimidated into ordering mineral water (by law, if you ask for tap water they have to give it to you), and don't believe the waiter will think you're a cheapskate either, as you can be sure he orders tap water when he goes out!



- **Don't avoid rosé:** for reasons that escape me, many visitors think it's downscale to drink rosé. On the contrary, most rosé is pretty good and it's a fashionable drink, especially so in the summer at aperitif (before dinner drinks). So you can order rosé with impunity and not feel like a cheapskate. Better still, plop an ice cube in your glass or carafe and sip gently (this southern France custom might shock some Parisians).
- **Don't mix up your salads:** watch out – if you order a hamburger that the menu claims comes accompanied by “salade”, then don't expect more than a token leaf of lettuce on the side of the plate, as a garnish. If you want a simple green salad with your meat, then you'll want to ask for a “salade verte” as a side order. On the other hand if you want a proper salad as a stand alone meal, then opt for a qualified salad, like “salade Parisienne”, “salade du chef”, etc. These have all sorts of wonderful things in them and make a fine meal.
- **Don't get star struck:** Home to many Michelin-starred restaurants, Paris is a gourmet's paradise. But a lot of pomp and circumstance—not to mention sky-high prices—accompany most of these traditional fine-dining establishments. Does the idea of half a dozen waiters hovering buzzard like around your table sound appealing? Or how about spending as much on dinner as you did on your plane ticket? No, I didn't think so. There is a more savvy and fashionable alternative: recently, several Michelin-starred chefs have abandoned the rigid confines of haute-cuisine restaurants to open

convivial bistros that serve up simpler (yet still outstanding) meals. And the locals are just crazy about them. Yves Camdeborde's pioneering *Le Comptoir du Relais*, in the 6<sup>th</sup> district next to Odéon metro, is so popular that it can be hard to get a table. But once you're tucking into Camdeborde's famous foie gras terrine for a fraction of what you'd pay elsewhere, you'll understand why the place is booked months in advance for dinner. If you can't get in at dinner, then arrive by 11:45 am for lunch (reservations are not accepted, so it's first come, first served).

- **Don't rush your meals:** What's the rush? Aren't you on vacation? If you are American, it might be a culture shock to eat a meal at a French restaurant. You won't find any "to go" signs, for a start, as fast food really goes against the French style. If your waiter doesn't rush over to bring you your check the moment you eat your last bite (he or she probably won't because they don't want you to feel rushed), don't be surprised. Enjoy a little more conversation, sips of wine and, if you're at a cafe, people-watching.

#### ▪ Mistake #4: Dressing like a tourist

It's somehow uncool to be readily identifiable as a tourist, isn't it? Nowhere is this more the case than Paris, a city of natural sartorial grace and beauty. Better to be associated with the effortless style of the Parisian, rather than just an outside observer of it. Here's how.

- **Don't dress too casually:** While the Parisians are increasingly wearing clothes like jeans and sneakers (particularly the young French), their casual dress is still dressier than American casual dress. You will blend in with the French more if you go with something casual but elegant.
- **Don't think casual means ugly:** Many Parisians wear jeans and a T-shirt. That doesn't mean they're not well dressed however... Best is to watch and learn from a café terrace in central Paris. You'll notice that the jeans are dark (pale blue jeans are so unfashionable it's not even funny), close and straight cut (baggy jeans are a no-no). T-shirts are close cut too, which doesn't mean too small. Each sleeve should have room for only the one arm and should not go more than half-way down to the elbow. If your T-shirt got scrunched in your suitcase, then iron it. Avoid mad motifs or clever-clever punch lines, unless you want to look like a student. The best T-shirts are close cut, with no or sober graphics, in a uniform neutral colour (navy blue, white, black, or a sophisticated grey or kaki). If you prefer more elaborate graphics, then you can opt for a vintage style, with deliberately faded colours and motifs. *Très cool!*
- **Don't underestimate black:** It's not boring or sinister, it's just plain stylish. Wearing black clothes means you eliminate the easy mistake of messing up the colour and looking like a brash and garish tourist. All you need take care of is the cut (close fitting, not XXL!). Whenever I see what is obviously a flashy-coloured tourist, I always wonder "wow, that guy would look *so much better* in a pair of dark jeans and a close-cut black turtleneck sweater!".
- **Don't wear sports-type trainers (sneakers):** Leave your gleaming white running shoes at home. Especially ones with space-age synthetic fabrics and upturned tips. There is simply no excuse for wearing these around town. I'm not suggesting that you walk for 8 hours a day in stiff leather shoes, but there is such a thing as an urban trainer. These are typically not gleaming white, don't have technical fabrics, don't

have clever-clever (bouncy) lower souls, and never ever have the turned-up tip at the front. The general rule for trainers would be: if they would be weird on a runner at a stadium, then they're probably ok. A safe bet is to go with something vintage looking. Have a look round sports shoe shops in the Marais, and if you're still lost, just wear classic fabric Converse trainers. You'll see lots of these treading the Paris cobbles.

- **Don't wear shorts:** Even on sweltering summer days, Parisians don't wear shorts. Wear a pair of thin light beige cotton trousers that let the breeze through, and you'll be fine. Wearing shorts will instantly mark you out as a tourist, unless you can pull off a Ralph Lauren kind of chic sports look, without trying too hard. If you *have to* wear shorts, please don't wear any shoes that take socks with them...
- **Don't overdress:** Even Parisian style isn't really about dressing to the nines; the French are quite casual these days—they've just mastered the art of the clean, coordinated look. Like I said above, black is always a good bet (or dark grey, if you really want to go nuts!); accessorize with a single bold scarf, hat, or jewel (but, *please*, not all three at once); and make sure things fit the way they should (no sagging or squeezing). Complete your outfit with a fitted jacket and the best shoes in your closet. The final effect should look utterly effortless. If you're a lady going out for a dressy evening, go for the fashion icon that is the little black dress. Avoid bright colours, unless you want to look like you've just been teleported from Sydney.
- **Don't wear a waist "banana":** I don't even know what these are called, but the French dismissively call them bananas, in reference to their waist-hugging shape. Sure, I understand that you've got essentials to carry around for the whole day. If you're a woman, enjoy a stylish handbag. If you're a man, either use an over-the-shoulder satchel (no smaller than standard letter paper size however, or you'll look like a civil servant from the 1970's), or a hand-held vintage sports bag.

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### ▪ Mistake #5: Tipping too much

When in Paris, you'll often quite rightly be enjoying local restaurants or just spending some wonderfully idle time on cafe terraces, people watching. But when the bill comes, a question remains: to tip or not to tip?

While it might seem polite and is undeniably generous to leave a big tip for great service, this isn't very French.

Cafes and restaurants in France include a 15 percent service charge in your check. This is required by French law as tips are assessed for taxation purposes. The 15 percent service charge is clearly itemized on your check, on top of the VAT sales tax. The words *service compris* (tip included) indicate that the service tip has already been included in the total to be paid. This means that there's no last-minute surprise when you are given your check. The



prices you see on the menu are what you get charged for, with no hidden extras. There's one sure-fire way to stand out as a tourist in France, which is to then leave another 15 to 20 percent on top of that.

So, no extra tips then? Well, a small extra-tip is always appreciated, of course. It's the mark you were satisfied with the way you were served by your waiter. It's a sort of a 'Thank You' note, but you are under no obligation here. Small extra tips are also appreciated because they directly line your waiter's pockets, unlike the 15 percent tip charge which is usually tallied up at the end of the day and divided amongst all waiters, or not, at the manager's discretion.

It is more customary to leave the change or some other small amount over the included tip. For a coffee or soft drink, you might leave 10 to 20 Euro cents. For lunch or dinner, maybe 1 to 5 Euros. Your little extra tip need not be over 5% of the total and, once again, is not an obligation but a "thank you" to reward good service. Rude waiters (should you encounter one) get nothing!

What about tipping in other situations? There are some cases where a tip is a welcome income boost to the beneficiary and is customary. For taxi drivers, tip 5 to 10%. In some expensive restaurants, or classical concerts halls or dance clubs, there are usually lobby ladies to take care of your coats. Unless a higher fixed amount is specified, it is customary to tip one Euro for every large item when you come back to pick up your belongings. The usher at the Opera House receives a Euro per person, while you may leave about 50 Euro cents to the lady who takes care of the lavatory (you'll see these less and less, however).

### ▪ Mistake #6: Shopping or dining on the Champs Elysées

It's true, the Champs-Élysées is perhaps the most beautiful avenue in the world and walking along it is most definitely a good idea, don't get me wrong. That said, it's a subtle place to understand. See, although this avenue used to be a symbol of Paris chic, the *Champs* (as locals simply call it) hasn't been fashionable for decades now (Parisians certainly don't aspire to live there anymore). It is currently overrun with global chain stores, movie multiplexes and a smattering of flagship stores for automobiles and luxury brands.



You'll find yourself dodging throngs of teens as you trudge past McDonald's and Sephora, wondering what in God's name all the fuss is about. Some of those youths will be tracksuit-wearing yobs too (called "racaille" in French, they'll leave you alone... unless you call them that!), who ride in from the suburbs by RER to the convenient Etoile station that, along with the Arc de Triomphe, marks the top of the avenue. And whatever you do, don't succumb to thirst or hunger on this strip: the cafés prey on tourists, and a local wouldn't be caught dead in one. If you must have a drink or snack, then grab something to go, preferably from the

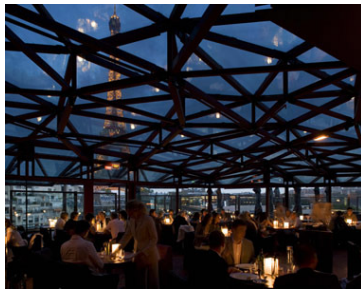
Monoprix supermarket at number 52. It's the only socially acceptable place to spend any money at all on the Champs Elysées.

So where should you spend your money instead? Be it clothes or meals, you won't go far wrong if you stick to the Marais (4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) or Saint Germain (6<sup>th</sup>). For fresh produce and more meals, I'd add the 7<sup>th</sup>, around rue Cler. Once again, this is one of the reasons why ALL A La Carte Paris apartments are located in these central districts.

### ▪ Mistake #7: Wasting time at the Eiffel Tower

In 2009, 6.6 million people visited the Eiffel Tower and, like lemmings, embarked on the laborious task of reaching the top. After trudging through one labyrinthine line for tickets and re-queuing for the cattle car-like elevators, you'll start to lose faith in the whole endeavour. And just when you think the ordeal is over, there are the lines to get back to terra firma. All that, only to realize that if you're experiencing a view *from* the tower, you can't actually enjoy the view *of* it—which is too bad, since it's the defining feature of the Paris skyline! So, a big waste of time all round.

Instead, enjoy dinner with a view of the Eiffel Tower. I recommend two magical options, that won't unduly break the bank.



*Les Ombres (the shadows)* is the rooftop restaurant of the Musée du Quai Branly. The restaurant's glass latticework ceiling makes the most of its tall neighbour by enabling diners to feast their eyes on the tower in its gorgeous entirety while dining on French classics. The view is at its most magical at night, when the tower glows ethereally and bursts into a glamorous sparkle every hour. At dinner, main courses start at about 25€.

<http://www.lesombres-restaurant.com/index.html>



The *Café de l'Homme* is integrated in the Musée de l'Homme above the fountains of Trocadéro square. Book in advance and ask for a table on the terrace, with a good view (a couple of tables are lacking the view). Main courses start from about 20€.

<http://www.restaurant-cafedelhomme.com/en/>

*(Update: The Café de l'Homme is currently closed for renovation, until summer 2012)*

## ▪ Mistake #8: Mixing up your greetings

Learning to greet people is an essential and often subtle part of learning a new language. Whether you're planning to continue learning French or just learn a few basics in preparation for a trip, these French greetings can help you on your way.

The basic French greeting is “bonjour”, which can mean *hello*, *good morning*, or *good afternoon*. Don't ever greet somebody with “bon matin” or “bon après-midi” as the first just means *early* and the second means *goodbye*! When greeting someone in the evening (beginning around 6pm), you say “bonsoir” instead. To greet someone informally at any time of day, you can say “salut”, meaning *hi*. Be careful, as “salut” would only be used with someone you know and who is roughly your age or less.

You should always greet people by saying one of the above. In some countries, it's acceptable to greet a salesclerk, for example, with just a smile, but not in France - always start out with a polite *bonjour*. When crossing paths with a stranger within your building, a verbal greeting is required (it's rude not to), though this custom ceases as soon as you walk out of your building. Also, when entering a waiting room or boarding a bus, the French will mutter *bonjour* as a general greeting to address everyone within earshot.

Should you know the person or if you are being introduced, then you're also expected to either *faire la bise* (kiss cheeks) or *se serrer la main* (shake hands). When arriving at work or school, this means that a French person will typically go around the room and individually greet each person.

### *Faire la bise* (exchanging kisses):

Greeting friends with an exchange of kisses is perhaps the most essential French gesture, and regional variations can make it somewhat tricky. Interestingly, this type of kissing is common in many cultures, yet many people associate it only with the French. *La bise* means kiss: French friends and acquaintances exchange kisses on alternating cheeks upon meeting and separating, regardless of sex (men will also *faire la bise*). Two people of roughly the same age, introduced by a mutual friend, may also *faire la bise*. Please note that the gesture isn't actually a kiss as such, merely a brief coming together of the cheeks – using the lips would be a sexual come-on, so be careful.

Now, it gets more complex when considering the number of kisses, which varies by region and for reasons that are difficult to pin down.

- Two *bises* (one on each cheek) is the national default and is the case for central Paris.
- Three *bises* are common in suburbs of Paris as well as certain southern parts of France.
- Four *bises* are exchanged in certain northern regions of France.

If this sounds confusing then rest assured, it is! There is no hard and fast rule, and even a French person would find it impossible to draw a map of the regional kiss numbers. So if you mess it up, don't worry, you're not alone.

### *Serrer la main* (shaking hands):

Although in very social contexts the French will exchange kisses upon meeting someone new, the French tend to shake hands in less social contexts, particularly in the business world. Acquaintances and business colleagues and associates also shake hands each time they see

one another (unless they are friendly and/or young enough to *faire la bise*) upon both arrival (especially) and departure (a casual wave can be acceptable here). The French handshake is quick and light - no pumping up and down or iron grips. If hands are full or wet, the French may offer an elbow or a finger for the other person to grasp. An auto mechanic will offer his wrist or sleeve for the other person to shake, thereby avoiding his greasy hands.

### **Exchanging pleasantries:**

Exchanging pleasantries about one's health is typical when greeting someone. There are several such ways to ask how someone is, and which one to use depends on whether you want to be formal or informal.

#### **Formal**

##### *Asking*

Whether talking to one person or more than one, ask *Comment allez-vous ? (How are you?)*

##### *Answering*

Je vais bien (*I'm fine*)

Bien, merci (*Fine, thanks*)

Bien, et vous ? (*Fine, and you?*)

#### **Informal**

##### *Asking*

The most common question is *Ça va ? (literally, Is it going?)*, and it has variations:

*Ça va bien ? (Is it going well?)*

*Comment ça va ? (How's it going?)*

If you're just talking to one person, you can also ask *Comment vas-tu ?* or *Tu vas bien?*

##### *Answering*

*Ça va (Fine)*

*Ça va bien (I'm doing well)*

*Pas mal (Not bad)*

*Bien, et toi ? (Fine, and you?)*

*Je vais bien (I'm fine)*

### **Saying goodbye in French:**

Here's how to say goodbye, depending on exactly what you mean:

*Au revoir (Good-bye) (pronounced « or voir »)*

*Salut (Bye)*

*À bientôt, À tout à l'heure (See you soon)*

*À plus, À plus tard (See you later)*

*À demain (See you tomorrow)*

*À la prochaine (Until next time)*

*Bonne journée (Have a nice day)*

*Bon après-midi (Have a nice afternoon)*

*Bonne soirée (Have a nice evening)*

*Bonne nuit (Good night)*

*Adieu (Farewell)*

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▪ **Mistake #9: Mixing up “tu” and “vous”**

Confusingly, French has two different words for *you*: “tu” (very nasal and hard to pronounce for an English-speaker) and “vous”. In English, the second person subject pronoun is conveniently always *you*, no matter how many people you're talking to, and whether you know them or not. In French, these distinctions are very important - you must understand when and why to use each of them. Otherwise, you may inadvertently insult someone by using the wrong *you*...

*Tu* is the familiar *you*, which demonstrates a certain closeness and informality. Use *tu* when speaking to one friend, one peer or colleague, one relative, one child.

“Vous” is the formal and plural *you*. It is used to show respect or maintain a certain distance or formality with someone. Use “vous” when speaking to anyone you don't know well, an older person, an authority figure, anyone to whom you wish to show respect. “Vous” is also the plural *you* - you have to use it when talking to more than one person, no matter how close you are.

Because the *tu / vous* distinction doesn't exist in English, English-speakers often have trouble with it. When in doubt, you should tend to “vous”. I'd rather show someone too much respect than not enough! And in case it is too much, the person will answer back with a cheery “on peut se tutoyer” (we can use *tu*). As opposed to “vouvoyer”, which means to use *vous*.

▪ **Mistake #10: Assuming everything will be open**

If you hit the tourist attractions at lunchtime and the restaurants at 3 p.m., you might find both closed and look like a tourist. For the French, mealtimes are sacred (are you surprised?) and many shops and attractions are therefore closed for lunch, for a full 2 hours from noon until 2pm. At these times, restaurants come alive and will generally stop serving food by 3pm at the latest.

You will have a much better experience if you know this before you go, and plan your days appropriately. Grab breakfast when the local boulangerie is well stocked with hot delicacies (from as early as you like, until around 9am). Then, explore Paris while everything is open in the morning, until noon. Have lunch at 1pm, when the restaurants are lively, and then head back into your Paris explorations from 2pm. By 7pm at the latest, most shops and daytime establishments (museums, etc.) will have closed, at which time you should be back home showering and getting changed for dinner, which should not be any earlier than 8pm, for ambiance's sake.

For food, supermarkets are normally open from 10am to 7pm, 6 days a week, though some smaller ones are open Sunday mornings too.

As for clothes don't make ambitious shopping plans for Sunday, when the government mandates that nearly all shops be closed. A notable exception to that rule is the area of the Marais around rue des Francs Bourgeois, which becomes a pedestrian shopping paradise on Sunday. As these just so happen to be some of the finest boutique clothes shops in Paris, it would be a shame not to take advantage and join the savvy Sunday shoppers!

▪ **Bonus survival tip: Avoid getting mown down by a lunatic driver!**

Although I've heard that both Greek and Indian drivers are even worse, you still need to adapt carefully to the Paris urban jungle of cars, motorbikes, scooters and bicycles. Here are some tips to stay out of harm's way:

- **When a zebra crossing is accompanied by traffic lights:** you can only cross when the little man symbol is green. When the man is red, this means that priority is given to cars, regardless of the zebra crossing on the road. Should you attempt to cross when the little man is red, expect the French driver to put you back in place by honking vehemently and even speeding up!
- **When a zebra crossing is stand-alone:** without traffic lights, this means that as a pedestrian, you always have priority. Beware however, as this rule is a bit theoretical and if a Paris driver can barge through anyway, then he will. The trick is to take a single first step out into the traffic, being prepared to stop and back-track, but looking like you're going to continue confidently to the other side, pretending not to look out for cars. Because if a French driver thinks you're going to cross and haven't seen him, then he'll stop. But if he reads you as hesitant, or sees you looking out for cars, then the Paris driver will simply drive on through without stopping, safe in the knowledge that you've seen him and won't attempt a bones vs. metal confrontation!
- **When crossing a street without any zebra crossings:** simply be careful, look both ways, and give way to cars. If your crossing forces a Parisian to even lift off the accelerator, then you'll probably get some Gallic arm-waving gesticulation. Parisians are seemingly always late for something, and don't like to be slowed down.



**Watch out for rogue *Vélibs*:** the *Velib* (a condensed *Vélo Libre*, or Freedom Cycle) is a world-class urban bicycle system, whereby you pay a small subscription (day, week or year) for the privilege of grabbing a bicycle, riding it, and dropping it off within 30 mins. It's very convenient, as the pick-up/drop-off stations are every 300m, all over the city (an amazing feat of urban engineering!). You'll see a lot of these rather smart looking khaki bicycles riding

through the city streets. I mention them here because the *Velib* cyclists are notorious rule breakers: you'll see them regularly taking one-way streets the wrong way and cruising through red lights without showing the slightest concern. Don't expect them to slow down and let you cross the road, either. Watch out. Unfortunately, most internationals are denied the pleasure of joining the mayhem, as you need a credit card with a microchip (like all French ones) to get a subscription from the automated units at each pick-up/drop-off station.

- **If you visit the *Arc de Triomphe*:** please, whatever you do, DO NOT attempt to cross on foot the *Place de l'Etoile* that surrounds the monument. There are special tunnels built to access the monument and these are obligatory. Crossing on foot, among the crazy car chaos, means the certainty of coming away petrified at the very least and the distinct possibility of being run over. You've been warned...



**What's up with *Place de l'Etoile* anyway?** The motoring on *Place de l'Etoile* is almost a tourist sight in and of itself. For full effect, you'll want to be passing through in a taxi. In this little lawless enclave, insurance companies actually have a gentleman's agreement that whenever there is an accident, then the responsibility is automatically split 50/50, *whatever the circumstances* (only in France...). Driving onto *Place de l'Etoile* is a

heroic show of aggressive machismo, where the game consists of arriving full bore, seemingly out control (but secretly ready to screech to a halt at any second), pretending not to see other cars. Make eye contact and you've lost, because the other driver will know that you've seen him and that you won't risk a crash, so he won't let you through. But if you just discreetly register him in your peripheral vision, while pretending not to actually see him, then you win the bluff, and can drive on through safe in the knowledge that the other driver will have to give way if he wants to avoid a crash. You know what? Paris driving schools are actually forbidden from taking their students to this no-rules land, and this is a unique situation. *Place de l'Etoile* is a strange planet, but you get used to it quite quickly and in reality it's more amusing than actually dangerous (I drive a car and I used to live just a stone's throw from l'Etoile, so I would know - never even got a scratch!).

### Wrapping it up:

I'm not sure why exactly people (myself included) don't like to be seen as tourists, but they certainly don't. Perhaps it has something to do with our deep-seated desire to fit in. Try approaching a stranger anywhere and opening with "Tell me, are you a tourist?" and just watch their dismayed expression at this subtle put-down, that implies that they don't fit in to the scene. When the scene in question is as archetypically trendy as Paris, the desire to fit in is all the more understandable. Plus, playing the Parisian is just a good fun and games, like a bit of theatrical role playing. It'll make your time in Paris all the more memorable.

My motivation in writing this report for you goes beyond simply helping you fit in however. I also want to make your stay more enjoyable and better value too. By adapting to local culture, you'll go with the flow rather than awkwardly swimming upstream.

I want your stay to be a happy vacation, not a cultural battle. Take heed of these 10 key points and you'll be well on your way to enjoying the Paris stay of your dreams!

Alex Wagner  
 Founder & CEO  
[A La Carte Paris](http://www.alacarteparis.com)

## Post-conclusion: So... how about booking an apartment with us?

Throughout this report, you may have noticed that we care about MANY aspects of your upcoming experience in Paris.

Now, what we want to emphasize is that we dedicate the same level of care to making YOUR stay in one of our apartments a Memorable Parisian Experience.

Here are some the things you'll get, when you book with A La Carte Paris :

✔ ALL our apartments are located in the center of Paris, so you will be near everything: from shopping places to delicious restaurants and major sights. All accessible on foot, because they are so close.

✔ ALL of our apartments have the unique A La Carte Paris look: a warm and welcoming design, with great detail touches. This is one of the aspects that our clients like the most (and why they keep coming back). Regularly, clients tell us that we've got the most beautiful apartment selection on the Internet. But don't take their word for it - have a look for yourself and browse online at: <http://www.alacarteparis.com>



✔ A deluxe welcome package, including a bottle of Bordeaux wine, fresh fruit, and a thorough guide booklet of your local area (so you are sure to get all the information you need and not miss anything).

✔ All the customer assistance you need. Although we are proud of each of our apartments, our very first focus is YOU. We care deeply about making your Parisian experience highly MEMORABLE. Therefore, we are available to help with any issue or question you might have during your stay.

Feeling ready? Want to find out more or browse or book your apartment?

Rendez-vous now at <http://www.alacarteparis.com>

Or if you prefer, feel free to give us a call at +33 (0) 1 42 46 42 57