

Ping, who often shares an apartment in the Marais (from the company A la Carte Paris) with three friends, says, "You experience the city like a local, and it's cheaper than a hotel. There are no minuses."

Embracing this scenario has become easier, thanks to the Internet and agents, but renting sight unseen can be daunting. After speaking to real estate and rental agents, as well as to owners and renters, and after visiting more than two dozen places in my adopted city, I have devised an essential list to help you land the pied-à-terre of your dreams.

1) THE BASICS

Rentals are divided into those whose owners either occupy them or are absentee and apartments owned and run by agencies. An advantage of the former can be a hands-on owner who adds a personal touch. The latter properties often come with more modern decor as well as amenities like kitchens and bathrooms.

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While the Internet is fine for preliminary research, keep in mind that photographs may be misleading (a "private" terrace I saw on-line, for example, turned out to be in a courtyard in view of everyone). Use the Net only as a starting point.

3) LOCATION

Paris is pretty compact, and the Métro (strikes notwithstanding) is a reasonable and efficient way to get around. Still, for a short stay you'll want to be centrally located, namely in the first, fourth, eighth or sixteenth arrondissement on the Right Bank or the fifth, sixth or seventh on the Left Bank. If traveling with children, you should factor in the distance to one of the city's famous gardens, like the Jardin du Luxembourg, in the sixth arrondissement, or the Jardin des Tuileries, in the first. Gourmets may want to be based close to a good market or a favorite bistro. A museum buff or music lover may prefer to be near the Louvre or the opera districts. Be aware of traffic noise, as apartments may face busy boulevards. Most of the places I visited had double-glazed windows, but be sure to ask.

The best way to experience the City of Light is by becoming a Parisian, if only for a little while. Here are ten tips for renting the perfect pied-à-terre.

by Jean Bond Rafferty

Part-time Paris

Who has not dreamed of reveling in the Parisian lifestyle in a pied-à-terre of one's own? "I'm sitting here in the study looking at a grand view of the Seine," writes a New York professor from his antiques-embellished Guest Apartment Services rental on the Île St.-Louis. "This is my second time in the apartment. The place is spotless, and my every need is met. Personal attention is combined with independence."

Staying in a pied-à-terre—a short-term apartment rental that ranges from a studio to an entire town house—is an increasingly popular option for the Paris-bound traveler. California-based Ellen Olivier and her husband alternate staying at the Hotel le Bristol with renting apartments so they can discover different neighborhoods and profit from the luxury of having enough space to, say, have a French tutor come over. New York fashion designer Mary

Strategies & Tactics

4) THE SEASON

Air-conditioning is not a given in Paris. Alison Patton and her husband, who rented a penthouse in the Latin Quarter with their two children and nanny, were caught in last July's heat wave, which made the zinc-roofed apartment stifling (only the master bedroom had an air conditioner). Always address the subject of temperature with your agency. Some first-rate companies will add AC units with advance notice; others will provide fans.



5) MUST-HAVES

It's important to define your priorities; the more specific you are, the easier it will be to discover a suitable match. "Americans are used to a lot of comfort," says Patton. For instance, some of the most beautiful buildings have just stairs or minuscule elevators. The best agents will take care of your luggage on arrival and departure, but reconsider a walk-up if you're traveling with an older parent or a baby in a stroller.

Another French idiosyncrasy: a bathroom often comes with only a bathtub and handheld shower. If an American-style shower is important to you, tell your agent. You'll also want to know if robes, slippers, hair dryers and the like are provided. Other things to think about: views; the availability of a balcony or a garden.

6) DETAILS

A well-equipped apartment should have a washer and dryer. Kitchens should come with a dishwasher, a microwave, a coffee-maker or espresso machine and a toaster. If you plan on entertaining, find out about the quantity (and quality) of the glassware

and dinnerware. Depending on the length of your stay, you'll want to determine if there's enough closet space. If sharing a rental with another couple, ask whether the two bedrooms are equally desirable.

7) AMENITIES

Inquire about the apartment's electronics: How many televisions are there? Are there English-language channels? Is high-speed Internet or WiFi available? Are local calls included in the rate? What are the long-distance charges? In terms of security, ask about safe-deposit boxes, building guards and secure door codes. Visitors traveling with toddlers should find out if the apartment is childproof.

8) STAFF

Weekly maid service should be included, and chefs can often be hired for an extra fee. Ultraluxe homes come with a staff in residence; check to see whether their wages and tips are reflected in the price.

Unique Properties & Events, can arrange hard-to-book restaurant reservations, personal shoppers, private visits to attractions, country weekends, Ducasse-trained chefs, babysitters and drivers.

9) EMERGENCIES

The real measure of service comes when something goes wrong. (A good question to ask: Can you be moved to another apartment?) Ascertain when the agents, managers or owners are on call; the best companies will offer 24/7 response.

10) COSTS

Reserve six months in advance for Easter and for the week between Christmas and New Year's. High season usually runs from May through July and from September through October. Most agents ask for 50 percent up front and 50 percent before arrival (plus a refundable security deposit). Agents should provide household insurance, but find out what your own homeowners' policy covers as well. Protecting yourself with cancellation insurance is also advisable. ❖

ABLE AGENTS

Some of my favorite rental companies:

A la Carte Paris BACKGROUND: Founded in 2001 by Burn Wagner. INVENTORY: Fifty-five apartments, from studios to four-bedrooms, with an emphasis on contemporary design. PRICES: From \$748 to \$6,240 a week. STANDOUT: A stylish two-bedroom in the Marais with an open-plan kitchen, living and dining room. CONTACT: alacarte-paris-apartments.com.

Chez Vous BACKGROUND: California-based, twenty-seven-year-old agency with a first-rate management team. INVENTORY: Forty-five one- to three-bedroom apartments, many decorated by Californian Myra Hofer. PRICES: From \$260 to \$980 a night. STANDOUT: Tour d'Argent, in the fifth arrondissement, a two-bedroom on the sixth floor with views of the Seine. CONTACT: chezvous.com.

Guest Apartment Services BACKGROUND: Founded in 1997 by Christophe Chastel and Philippe Pée. INVENTORY: Thirty apartments, from studios to five-bedrooms, in and around the Île St.-Louis. PRICES: From \$210 to \$920 a night. ADDED VALUE: Concierge service. STANDOUT: A two-bedroom top-floor apartment on the Quai de Bourbon with contemporary furniture. CONTACT: guestapartment.com.

Paris Prime Rentals BACKGROUND: Founded in 2001 by Paris-based Italian Davide d'Ambrosi. INVENTORY: Forty-five apartments. PRICES: From \$200 to \$2,625 a night. ADDED VALUE: Concierge service. STANDOUT: A four-bedroom town house off the Place des Vosges with a greenhouse, terraced garden and indoor pool. CONTACT: parisprimerentals.com.

RothRay BACKGROUND: Founded in 1985 by English manager Ray Lampard and French-Cambodian designer Mono Roth. INVENTORY: Ten apartments around the Hôtel de Ville, Les Halles and St.-Germain-des-Prés. PRICES: From \$145 to \$250 a night. ADDED VALUE: Concierge service. STANDOUT: 22 Rue Pierre Lescot, a one-bedroom on the third floor with views of Les Halles. CONTACT: rothray.free.fr.

Unique Properties & Events BACKGROUND: Cedric Reversade and Paul Maxime Koskas ran a concierge service for seven years before opening this exclusive rental operation. INVENTORY: Six properties. PRICES: From \$15,750 to \$59,060 a week. ADDED VALUE: Staff and concierge service. STANDOUT: Faubourg St.-Germain, in a town house with reception rooms, a library, garden, home cinema and gym. CONTACT: cedricreversade.com. ~J.B.R.