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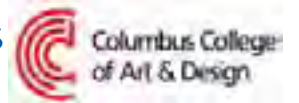
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Traveling with High Street to...

Paris and its Historic Neighborhoods

By Aaron Leventhal

Paris, universally acclaimed as the world's most beautiful and cosmopolitan city, is legendary for its classical architecture, broad boulevards, sidewalk cafes, fashionable boutiques, exquisite gardens and public squares, art museums and icons such as the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe. However, it's Paris' colorful historic neighborhoods that have kept me returning to the "City of Light" for more than three decades.

My wife Beth and I stayed at the Hotel du Vieux Marais (www.vieuxmarais.com), an economical boutique hotel in the heart of the lively, historic district of Le Marais. In the lobby we were fortunate to discover a brochure by "Paris Walks," a company offering two daily walking tours led by professional, English-speaking guides through many of the city's fabled neighborhoods

"Paris Walks" was founded in 1994 by Peter and Oriel Caine, an English couple from Cornwall who fell in love with Paris and wanted to share their discoveries with visitors. All of the walks last about two hours, cost 12 euros (about \$20), require no reservations and usually attract small groups of 15-20 persons. All tours begin at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., rain or shine every day of the year.

During our nine-day stay we took three walking tours. Each day was a mini-vacation to a new, distinctive and memorable place. Before or after the tour we enjoyed lunch at a sidewalk café and spent the day in the neighborhood strolling along the narrow streets and broad boulevards, taking photographs and shopping.

Here's just a sample of our "Paris Walks" experiences. Other walks include St-Germain-des-Pres, Le Marais and specialized tours through Hemingway's Paris and French Revolution sites.

Ile de la Cite. The island and birthplace of Paris was settled by the Parisii, a 300 B.C. Celtic tribe, and later was a Roman garrison before becoming the seat of power for the Frankish monarchy for almost 1,000 years. Major sights include the incomparable Notre Dame cathedral; the fashionable Champs Elysees; the jewel-like stained glass of Ste-Chapelle; the Louvre, arguably the world's greatest art museum; Jardin des Tuileries, landscaped gardens designed in the 16th century linking the Louvre to Place de la Concorde; and the Palais Royale, constructed in the 15th century for Cardinal Richelieu.

Village of Montmartre. The rural village outside the city walls was annexed to Paris in the 19th century, but Montmartre always has stood apart. Its beauty, country atmosphere and low rents have attracted poets and artists such as Utrillo, Modigliani, Renoir, Matisse and Picasso. Montmartre's narrow streets are filled with art galleries, boutiques, cafes and artists' studios. Our tour included the Basilique du Sacre Coeur at the top of a butte overlooking the city; La Galette, the last surviving windmill; and the historic Musee de Montmartre, which evokes the atmosphere of the village's early days.



Travel writer Aaron Leventhal (right) enjoys a visit to Montmartre led by Peter Caine of Paris Walks, www.paris-walks.com.

Photo by Beth Ervin Leventhal

The Latin Quarter. Since the founding of the Sorbonne in the Middle Ages, the Latin Quarter, on the Left Bank of the Seine, has been a student neighborhood. We enjoyed wandering through the tangle of narrow streets filled with hip boutiques, cafes and restaurants radiating out from Place St-Michel Square. Churches of note are St-Etienne-du-Mont, with its mix of 16th century Gothic and Renaissance architecture; and St-Severin, celebrated for its palm tree-style columns and religious depictions in ancient stained glass windows, which share space with seven 20th century windows by Jean Bazaine.

Travel writer Aaron Leventhal is editor and publisher of *High Street Neighborhoods*.



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