

# Paris Visitor Tips and Observations

Bruce D. Judd, FAIA

*“Paris is always a good idea.” – Audrey Hepburn*

*“America is my country, and Paris is my home town.” – Gertrude Stein*

Some of these tips may seem obvious, but in your excitement to be traveling you may forget them. Others may be new to you. I hope that they all will make your trip safer and more enjoyable.

## **General Tips**

1. Be smart and get travel insurance. It is the most certain way of making your travels safe and secure.
2. The next step to safety while traveling is getting the right, doctor recommended vaccinations for yourself.
3. Don't put yourself on the radar of criminals. Try not to stand out in how you're dressed and avoid wearing clothes and carrying items that scream 'Tourist'. Dress inconspicuously and try mixing in with the locals. Parisians tend to dress up more than Americans, so select what you think is appropriate and then dress up more. Locals do not(!) wear ball caps, cargo pants, sweats, white socks, flip-flops and flashy tee shirts.

This doesn't mean you need to pack super high-fashion outfits to wear in Paris, but if you want to blend in and not stand out as an obvious foreigner, I would bring simple, tasteful clothing in dark and neutral colors.

Additionally, Parisians tend to cover up more, even during the summer. Don't wear short shorts and a tank top unless you want to immediately stand out as a tourist.

4. Learn some French before you travel. While many Parisians do speak English, there's no reason to live up to the "obnoxious American" stereotype by only speaking English while you're in France.

Learning a few key phrases in French, like hello, good morning, goodbye, please, thank you, etc. and using them will go a long way in establishing goodwill with Parisians that you encounter.

5. Make friends with the local people. Not only is it a quintessential part of experiencing a new culture, your local contacts, and their wise suggestions can help you steer clear off dangers.

## Paris Visitor Tips and Observations – Bruce D. Judd, FAIA

6. Learn about safe and unsafe places. It is always better to get an idea about the safe places and unsafe areas where you are traveling. Talk to the staff at your hotels/hostels, restaurants you visit and download all local information and recommended places to visit.
7. Don't fall for any tourist-trap scams. There are various types specifically targeted at tourists. Know about them and fend them off. (See below)
8. Keep a list of emergency numbers handy. Keep embassy numbers (See below) and 24x7 hotline numbers on you. Write down the name of your hotel or VRBO and their address with cross streets in case you have an emergency (or lose your phone).
9. Avoid cash, use credit cards when you can. Choose a solid travel card or use the Credit/Debit cards that you've already gotten in your name. If anything goes wrong, you can simply block your cards. Do keep some cash in small denominations for use on small items.
10. Stay in touch with someone back at home. Make it a daily habit of sharing your whereabouts and your updated travel plans with a loved one back at home.
11. A dummy wallet with some junk in it is a good protection plan against pickpockets.
12. Don't put anything in the back pockets of your jeans or trousers. These are not the place to keep your stuff while being out there on the road. Concentrate on the front pockets.
13. Greet shopkeepers. Many tourists don't know about this faux pas, but not greeting the shopkeeper when you walk into the store is considered extremely rude in France.  
  
Unless it's a huge store like a department store or grocery store, you should always greet the shopkeeper with "Bonjour Madame/Monsieur" and thank them with "Merci, au revoir" when you leave (even if you don't buy anything.)
14. Tipping is already included in the bill at restaurants in Paris, and it's usually a 10-15% charge. So tipping on top of this is not needed because servers in Paris are already paid a living wage.  
  
Of course, if you had really excellent service you can always leave an additional tip to show your appreciation, but it's not required.
15. Don't Forget a Travel Adapter. Outlets and voltage are different in France, so you will need a travel adapter in order to use any of your electronics such as phone and laptop chargers.
16. Don't over-plan your Trip. Even if you only have a few days in Paris, you shouldn't try to cram in as much sightseeing and activities as possible, or you will end up burnt out and missing the real Parisian experience.

## **Paris Visitor Tips and Observations – Bruce D. Judd, FAIA**

Instead, try to work some down time in your itinerary and spend it lounging in Luxembourg Garden, strolling along the Seine, or wandering down ancient alleyways in the Latin Quarter. This is how you can experience the “real” Paris and see what makes it such an enchanting city.

### **Be Aware of Your Surroundings**

1. Don't let your guard down to snap the perfect picture for your social media platforms. Keep an eye on your personal belongings at all times and use good judgment when talking to strangers. A big part of the joy of traveling is the opportunities it affords to meet new people and learn about their cultures. But if someone near you is acting suspiciously, or if you feel uncomfortable, leave the area immediately.

### **Public Places & Public Transportation**

1. Do not leave your bags and luggage unattended, and do not accept any bags or packages from a stranger (Duh!).
2. Do not read a map, or look at an iphone or ipad when trying to walk. You are both a potential target for pick pocketing and you may walk into traffic. Don't make your destination and your route obvious to the onlookers and by passers.
3. Wipe that lost look on your face, even if you are lost! If you are in the middle of the road, map (or iPhone) in hand and a big frown on your face, you might just make yourself a target. Instead, make your way to a nearby shop or bench and get your directions sorted there.
4. In case you discover any suspicious item, do not touch it and immediately approach the police services.
5. Do not flash your valuables in the public. Pack in those heavy diamond rings and gold necklaces and give junk jewelry a go! That expensive \$1,000 DSLR around your neck might just make you a target. Better keep it safe in the backpack and bring it out when you find something capture worthy.
6. Travel light on public transport. Gather your essentials in one backpack and shed off that extra weight. It can get hard to keep a track of all your things on an overcrowded bus or train!
7. Do not let any individual go through a turnstile/gate directly behind you.
8. Do not throw away your Subway ticket. Always be sure to hold onto your Metro ticket instead of throwing it away in the station before you board your train.

Occasionally, there are metro officers waiting at the exit and they will be checking tickets to make sure you paid. If you are caught without your ticket, you can face a steep fine, so always hang on to your tickets until you're out of the station!

9. Pickpockets on the Metro. While pickpockets can be anywhere, one common place for them to operate is on the Metro, especially on crowded trains. Usually

## **Paris Visitor Tips and Observations – Bruce D. Judd, FAIA**

they will work in pairs and strike when the train stops and people are getting on and off. One person will distract you by bumping into you, grabbing you, or getting in your personal space, while the other person will then quickly snatch your wallet/cell phone/jewelry and hop off the train

11. Never stand at edge of the platform. Stand back and only move forward when the front of the train has passed you.
12. How to avoid it: Always be vigilant when you're on a crowded train and keep an eye on the people around you. If possible, move to a less crowded car. Try to have a hand on your valuables at all times and make sure you aren't keeping things like your wallet or cell phone in your back pocket or an exterior pocket of your bag where they can easily be snatched.
13. Don't be a novice when choosing cabs over public transportation. Always opt for Radio Taxis and share your ride details with someone you trust.
14. Avoid sharing taxis with strangers. That airport taxi may be expensive but sharing it with a stranger is not the way to go about it.
15. Never buy tickets from scalpers who will charge you extra (up to ten times their value). Use ticket counters or ticket-issuing machines in train/bus/subway stations.
16. Be wary of public Wi-Fi. Don't let the convenience of Internet access cloud your judgment. When you use public Wi-Fi, hackers looking to steal valuable information can access your data including credit card or Social Security numbers. If you do need wireless Internet service, set up a virtual private network (VPN) that will allow you to access the Internet securely while traveling.

### **Hotels and Other Accommodations**

Even if your hotel has strong security measures in place, there are steps you can take to make your room safer. Lock and dead-bolt the door and keep your windows shut. You can buy a jammer, which is a portable device that slips under the door for another layer of protection.

1. Try to give the impression that you're in your room even when you're away, such as placing the Do Not Disturb sign on the outside of your door and keeping the blinds or windows closed.
2. Don't let any strangers into your room, even if they say they work for the hotel. You can always call the front desk to check whether someone was ordered by hotel staff to come to your room.
3. Review the escape routes in your hotels/hostels. Keeping your escape routes mapped in your mind can be helpful for you as well as others in times of distress.

### ***Pick Pockets***

## **Paris Visitor Tips and Observations – Bruce D. Judd, FAIA**

1. Pickpockets can scam in pairs – frequently on the escalators on the way up to street level: One will stop suddenly at the top exit, as though he's dropped something; while you try to avoid running over him, you're jostled from the rear by the second one, who lifts your wallet.
2. Cafe pickpocket. Pickpockets will typically try to cause a commotion and then steal your valuables while you're distracted. At outdoor cafes and restaurants, here's how it works: Someone will come up to you and start talking, while shoving something in your face, maybe a flyer or a petition of some sort. They will hold it over your cell phone if it's lying on the table and then stealthily grab your phone while they keep talking to distract you.
3. How to avoid it: Don't lay your cell phone or any other valuables on the table at a sidewalk cafe! Keep your phone in your pocket or purse/backpack. If someone approaches your table, firmly tell them to leave or just ignore them until they go away.

### ***Be Careful in the Street***

1. Carry a small bag or a waist-bag/fanny-pack, rather than a backpack.
2. If an assailant tries to snatch your bag, do not resist, or you may be injured.
3. Do not put your phone and/or portable music player in an outside pocket of your bag or garments.
4. Beware of individuals who may divert your attention in order to steal your personal belongings.
5. Yell loudly for help if you feel you are in imminent danger or threatened/accosted by anyone.
6. Steer clear of commotions and street demonstrations.

### ***In Restaurants & Cafés***

1. Do not leave your methods of payment in cloakrooms or in your coat on a chair (a pickpocket could sit behind you and steal your belongings).
2. Never lay your bag at your feet.
3. Do not leave your mobile phone or your wallet on the table.
4. Keep your drinks safe. Accepting drinks from strangers in a nightclub is a big no-no in the travel safety rule book. Order your own drink and see them made before you and avoid anything being slipped into it.
5. Avoid getting sloshed at a party. Numbing your nerves too much is not a great way of being aware of your immediate surroundings. Drink responsibly; it is not

## **Paris Visitor Tips and Observations – Bruce D. Judd, FAIA**

your last night out. Even your party gang won't like babysitting a passed out drunk.

### ***Your Money***

1. Carry as little cash as you can.
2. Use small denominations, credit/debit cards, or travelers' checks for any purchases.
3. Carry your money in several places (bags, pockets, money-belt...)
4. Do not put your wallet in your back pockets; a front pocket (on pants) or inside jacket pocket is better.
5. Keep the PIN code numbers of your credit cards confidential and note them down in a safe place (both electronically and on paper), in case of loss or theft.
6. Use ATMs at reputable banks, in well-lit areas.
7. Don't access ATMs in secluded places. Mugging is the order of the day in many countries and it's on you as a traveler to avoid any situations that might lead to that somehow.

### ***Your Personal Identification Documents***

1. Remember to photocopy your passport and any other identification papers to facilitate their re-issue; keep the copies in your hotel or your temporary place of residence. You never know when you might need a copy of your passport, driver's license or another form of identification. Scan these documents to save online and print out several hard copies. That way, you won't be scrambling to find proper documentation if you need to get home.
2. Keep track of your vaccine documents.
3. In case of loss, contact your country's consulate; in case of theft, also declare it to the police. (See below for US Embassy information)
4. Note down the address and phone number of your hotel or temporary residence, and keep them with you.
5. Keep your passport and cards close to your body. Tape them on to your torso if you feel the need even, there couldn't be any safer place for them.
6. Some swindlers may impersonate police officers, asking for your identification and money. First of all, bear in mind that a real police officer will never ask for money.

You should request to see their white plastic multihued card indicating "Police" in the lower quarter, with a diagonal blue, white and red ribbon in the upper left corner, and bearing various holographic images.

## Important Information

### U.S. EMBASSY

#### [U.S. Embassy Paris](#)

2 avenue Gabriel

75008 Paris

France

Phone: [33] [\(1\)43122222](tel:+33143122222)

Alt Phone: [\(33\) 1 42 66 97 83](tel:+33142669783)

Embassy is a 4-minute walk from Place de la Concorde at the northwest corner, At 2 Ave. Gabriel, just west of Rue d'Boissy d'Anglas.

#### U.S. Embassy Paris

- Email: [Citizeninfo@state.gov](mailto:Citizeninfo@state.gov)
- Phone (Dial '1' then '0' when you hear the automated greeting)
  - From France: 43.12.22.22
  - From U.S. (landline): 33.1.43.12.22.22
  - From U.S. (cell phone): Hold down the 0 (zero) until + appears, then dial 33.1.43.12.22.22
- Other Important Emergency Numbers in France:
- Medical Emergencies: 112 or 15
- Victims of Crimes: 17
- Fire: 18

For life or death emergencies, dial 112 for immediate assistance.

Please note that for the duration of the COVID-19 curfew, Embassy and Consulate consular business hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. In the case of an emergency involving a U.S. citizen in France, you can reach the U.S. Embassy during business hours and after hours, seven days a week.

Emergencies include:

- [Death of a U.S. citizen](#)
- [Arrest of a U.S. citizen](#)
- [Serious illness or injury](#)
- Children's issues, including child [abduction in progress](#)
- [Victims of Crime](#)

Emergency services do not require an appointment.

Note: Paris is 6 hours ahead of Washington, DC (EST)

The following services are not considered emergencies and are processed during regular business hours:

- [Passport Applications](#)
- [Reports of Birth Abroad](#)
- [Notarial Services](#)
- [Visa Services](#)
-

### **Scammers in Paris**

Most scam artists operate in the more touristy areas of Paris. I have noticed the highest concentration around the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, the Louvre, and Sacré-Cœur.

During peak tourist season (June through September and around the holidays) they are out in full force. So if you're traveling at this time, you'll want to be extra vigilant.

The best way to deal with scammers is to totally disengage yourself from them. Ignore them, walk right past them, avoid eye contact, pretend like you can't hear them or don't understand English. Etc.

### **General tips to avoid being targeted for scams**

Scammers are annoying and pervasive around the touristy areas of Paris, but there are a few things you can do to make sure you aren't targeted for a scam.

Here are some of the best things you can do to avoid becoming a scammer's mark:

1. Don't dress like a tourist. The more you blend in, the less you will be hassled by scammers. Don't wear the "typical American" tourist uniform of t-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops. Don't wear a fanny pack. And definitely don't walk around carrying a selfie stick!
2. Don't speak English really loudly. The fastest way to make yourself a target for scammers or pickpockets is by walking around in a group loudly speaking English.
3. Be aware of your surroundings. Another way to make yourself a target is by wandering around clueless. This makes it extremely obvious that you're a tourist. Don't walk around with your face glued to your cell phone or a map. Try to be aware of your surroundings at all times.
4. Don't be afraid to be rude. This is one of the EASIEST ways to avoid becoming the victim of a scam in Paris. Most scammers prey on people's politeness and sympathies. You can avoid 99% of all scams if you just totally ignore any stranger that tries to engage you. Stare straight ahead, act like they don't exist, pretend you can't hear them, etc.

Stay away from extreme crowds. The most common place for a scam or theft to occur is in a crowded area. Whether it's the swarm of people fighting to see the Mona Lisa at the Louvre, a crowded Metro platform, or a packed sidewalk on the Champs-Élysées, try to disengage yourself from huge crowds until they disperse, or take an alternate route.

5. Carry a whistle and use it if you are really hassled.



### **How to deal with scammers**

Here are some of the most common tourists scams in Paris. You can spot a lot of these scams from a mile away, so you can just cross the street to get away from them, or walk in the opposite direction.

- 1. Gold Ring Scam** This is one of the most irritating yet common scams in Paris. Usually it will happen when you're walking along the Seine or near the Eiffel Tower. Someone will approach you with a gold ring that they "found" and ask you if you dropped it. They will expect you to say no, and then they will pretend to examine the ring and exclaim how valuable it is. They'll then attempt to sell you the ring for a good price (of course, the ring is total junk.)

How to deal with it: Ignore them and keep walking. Or firmly say "No" and keep walking.

- 2. Friendship Bracelets at Sacré-Cœur** The friendship bracelet scam is one of the most annoying. There are a lot of guys hanging out around Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre. It's almost impossible to avoid them as you're walking up the hill to the church. What they will do is come up to you, act really friendly, and start tying some strings around your wrist. They'll quickly braid a "friendship bracelet" onto your wrist and then demand that you pay for it. (So much for being friendly.)

An added bonus for this one is that they may have a second person who comes up behind you while you're distracted by the bracelet scam and pickpockets you.

How to avoid it: These guys can be pushy, so be equally pushy back if they won't leave you alone. Ignore them, cross your arms, and walk away.

- 3. Signing a Petition Scam** This is another really annoying scam that you may encounter a lot in Paris, mainly around Notre Dame and the Louvre/Tuileries Gardens area. A few women will come up to you asking you to sign a petition. It's always for some noble cause like women's education or support for the deaf, but of course it's all fake. They'll ask for your signature and then aggressively demand a "donation" for their cause after you sign.

How to avoid it: You will have to straight up dodge these women. They're really easy to spot because they walk around carrying clipboards. Usually they'll approach you saying "Do you speak English?" at which point you can just give them a confused look and walk away.

- 4. The rose scam** These scammers strike when you're enjoying a nice stroll along the Seine or wandering around at the Eiffel Tower. A guy will come up to you and try to give you a rose as a "gift." When you accept the "gift" he will then aggressively ask for payment. Alternatively, the scammer will come up to a couple, give the girl a rose, and then demand that the boyfriend/husband pay for it.

How to avoid it: Change your path, cross your arms, and avert your gaze when you see one of these guys coming towards you with their arm outstretched holding a rose.

5. **Overcharging at Restaurants** There are a lot of scams and ways you can get ripped off at restaurants and cafes in Paris. Mainly, these scams occur in really touristy areas, such as around the Eiffel Tower and the Champs-Élysées. Some variations of this scam can be giving you a menu with no prices and then presenting you with an exorbitant bill, giving you a special “tourist menu” with extremely inflated prices, or sneakily adding items you didn’t order to your bill.

How to avoid it: Basically, don’t eat at any restaurant/cafe that’s right by a major tourist landmark unless you’ve researched it in advance first. Not only are you likely to get ripped off, the food is probably going to be terrible too. Try to research some great restaurants in Paris before your trip and look for places that are off the beaten path!

6. **Shell game/cup game** This is one of the oldest scams in the book, but people still fall for it all the time. Someone on the street will be demonstrating a little “game.” They will have three shells or cups on a table with a ball hidden under one of them. The scammer will quickly shuffle the shells or cups around and ask you to guess which one is hiding the ball. You make a bet, and if you guess correctly, you’ll get double your money back.

The game looks deceptively easy, but of course it’s all rigged. The scammer uses sleight of hand to remove the ball so you have a zero chance of winning. They will also have people working with them in the crowd who pretend to play and make the game look extremely easy.

How to avoid it: Pretty simple, just keep walking if you see one of these games going on.

7. **ATM scams** There are a lot of variations on this scam, with the end goal being to steal your money. Usually someone will approach you while you’re at an ATM and offer to “help” you or tell you that the ATM is broken and suggest that you enter your PIN. They will watch you enter your PIN and then snatch your ATM card and run off with it to withdraw money somewhere else.

How to avoid it: If anyone approaches you while you’re using an ATM, stop what you’re doing and make a big scene until they leave. Make sure that you keep hold of your ATM card/wallet. Try to use ATMs inside banks if at all possible.

8. **Paying for water at a restaurant** If you order water at a restaurant, you might receive bottled water and be charged a few Euros for it. In order to avoid this, be sure to order a carafe of water (“une carafe d’eau”) at the restaurant and you will receive a pitcher of tap water for free.

Tap water is perfectly safe to drink in Paris and tastes the same, so there’s no reason to pay extra for bottled water (unless you really want to for some reason.)

*Revised 2012, 2019, 2021*