

Paris

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Paris is close enough for an impromptu weekend trip and with the Eurostar connection and most regional airlines offering cheap flights, what better time to take your loved one on a visit to the city of romance?

Actually, there is so much to see and do in Paris it's worth staying a little longer than a weekend if possible. As the saying goes, Paris is best in the springtime but any time of year is good for a city trip, although in August, most Parisians go on holiday and everything closes, including many restaurants.

You certainly won't be stuck for fabulous food in this gastronomic paradise; your main problem will be leaving the restaurants in order to see the sights. Of course, no trip to Paris would be complete without a visit to the Eiffel Tower, and, if you don't mind heights, take a trip up the tower where three levels are open to the public. Marvel at the girders from below then head for the lifts.

Queues can get very long though, but you can walk up the stairs to the 1st or 2nd platforms and get the lift to the top from there. If cathedrals are more your choice of attraction, then Paris has two of the most spectacular in the world: the dazzling whitedomed Basilique du Sacré Coeur stands proud at the very top of Montmartre Hill and is a beautiful and much loved part of the Parisian skyline. The dramatic Cathédrale de Notre Dame is a Gothic masterpiece of medieval architecture complete with superb rose windows and rather menacing gargoyles.

In both cathedrals you can climb right up to the top of the towers for incredible views of Paris. On the steps leading up to the Sacré Coeur, scores of street performers congregate together with accompanying crowds of spectators and many an hour can be spent here partaking in the sport of people-watching. The surrounding Montmartre area was the hub for artists in the past and continues to attract them to this day. Another place that street performance is common is around the modern art gallery known as the Beaubourg, or Centre Pompidou. This peculiar building is a creative example of modern architecture. In order to keep the interior wall clear for artworks, the building was designed 'inside out' so all the ducts, pipes and vents are on the outside of the structure and painted vivid colours.



If you have time, a trip to the world's greatest art museum, The Louvre, is a cultural revelation. It is huge, and it's unlikely you will be able to visit all the exhibits as there are over 30,000 artworks on display, including the Venus de Milo and Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, which is surprisingly small. Again, queues are long, so either buy your ticket in advance or enter the museum via the underground shopping centre.

A truly romantic end to a day in Paris is a dinner cruise. Take one of the Bateaux Mouches cruise boats travelling along the River Seine through the centre of Paris viewing the illuminated treasures of this magnificent city. Paris by night or day is a memorable experience.

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