

# Paris – good enough to eat

Karen Reyment has been seduced by the City of Love, but it's food rather than romance that has turned her head

I grew up in a happy home filled with the smells of mum's home cooking, which became the foundation for my love of food, but it was just the appetiser for what I would experience in Paris, the City of Love. Paris is abundant with foodie places that tempt, seduce and mostly satisfy and my most special memories of the city are centred on food. But to ensure the flirtation is one you will never forget, rather than one which might break your heart, it helps to know where to go.

## Affair to remember

I had been a loyal patron of Christian Constant until a la Reine Astrid Chocolatier caught my eye at nearby 24 Rue du Cherche-Midi with the most precocious store-front display I had ever seen. It was enchanting. A la Reine Astrid was founded in 1935 and has a reputation for quality and French tradition. It sells chocolates with hearts of ganache, nuts, nougats and caramels, and truffles in varieties of burned caramel, champagne and Armagnac. There's a selection of elegant *aiguillettes*, chocolate covered fingers of orange, lemon, grapefruit or ginger. Linen bags filled with tiny balls of chocolate caviar come accompanied by a tiny whisk to help you make a smooth and decadent hot chocolate at home.

## Strolling with food

Rue Montorgueil is a pedestrian market street located close to Les Halles which is a haven for food lovers and frequented by Parisian chefs for fresh supplies of fish, cheese, meat, charcuterie and more. These stores are perfect for picnic supplies. Many shops spill out onto the cobbled street, where tourists rub shoulders with locals going about their daily lives.

There are many cafes and restaurants that line Rue Montorgueil. Au Rocher De Cancale has been operating since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the building is a beautiful sight. I like to sit in a cafe opposite to gaze on its enchanting facade. The cafe where I sit is called Le Centre Ville at 57 Rue Montorgueil. It is one of my preferred people-watching places in Paris, and they serve the most luxuriously rich hot chocolate. I love to begin my day here with the simplicity of a fresh

*tartine*, hollowed out and spread with pale butter and apricot jam. The *tartines* are chewy and yeasty and the service comes with a smile.

Stohrer Patisserie is a near neighbour at number 51, one of the oldest in Paris which has been open since 1730. I can highly recommend the chocolate *éclairs* and *Le Baba Au Rhum*. Nicolas Stohrer created the Baba here in this very building.

You can see the beautiful Rue Montorgueil, captured by Monet in his 1878 painting 'La Rue Montorgueil' on display just over the Seine at Musée d'Orsay.

## Gourmet goodies

When I visit Paris, I promise myself to spend a few hours alone. My internal compass leads me to Place de la Madeleine in the 8<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, where I am assured a good dose of foodie finds. For example, Maille is a store not to be missed. Here you will find traditional varieties of mustard like the classic Dijon or the *Mi Forte* with just a little kick, as well as more modern and innovative mustards flavoured with Thai spices and mango, and the *Fins Gourmet*, which is delicately punctuated with turmeric, cinnamon and ginger.

The Maille boutique store sells earthenware pots, which you can fill with a variety of mustards on tap, or choose from an equally creative range of oils and vinegars.

Fauchon, established in 1886, is a gourmet's delight of tea, coffee, patisserie items, chocolates, truffles, spices, caviars, foie gras, and that is just the beginning. When I



A La Reine Astrid Chocolatier



Ladurée patisserie sweet treats

return home from Paris, 1kg of my luggage is always allocated to a box of wrapped and paired Fauchon sugar cubes. I don't care what I have to leave behind in order to bring them home. A girlie afternoon tea is just not the same without my sugar-bowl overflowing with pale pink cubes stamped 'F' for Fauchon.

At Hediard, open since 1872, shelves and cabinets are laden with preserved fruits, jams, marmalades, jellies, marzipans, chocolates, confectionary, coffee, tea, charcuterie, terrines, potted foie gras, biscuits, condiments, ice-creams, wines, champagnes, liquors and spirits. They are famous for their fruit jellies which they have been making for 150 years. The jellies lie in their boxes arranged in a checkerboard pattern of exciting colours and flavours. Personal favourites are chestnut, fig and pear.

After wandering around the wonderful Place de Madeleine, I walk down the Rue Royale to my favourite patisserie, Ladurée at number 16, where my order is always the same – the *tarte passion-framboise*. Not the cheapest place to buy patisserie items, but an indulgence worth the temporary flight of fantasy.

## Neighbourhood bistros

There is nothing quite like dining in an authentic Parisian bistro, well clear of the tourist traps, which are often disappointing. There is a tiny *crêperie* called Au Lys D'Argent, located at 90 Rue St-Louis, bang in the middle of Isle St-Louis. This is a place that won't break the bank. I am



Au Rocher De Cancale is a landmark on the Rue Montorgueil

told it is frequented by Parisian celebrities but Au Lys D'Argent is best known and respected for its hot chocolate. Allow at least 10 minutes for it to be made. They are made slowly and lovingly by melting a bar of chocolate into hot milk. They arrive thick, rich and steaming, and are absolutely worth the wait.

If you have room for a little more, Glacier Berthillon is just down the road at number 29-31 Rue St-Louis. The line of clientele often winds its way down the street, particularly in summer months and is testament to the popularity of Berthillon's ice-creams and sorbets. I can't go past the peach and raspberry sorbets.

Not far from the Bastille, at 13 Rue de Charonne, in the 11<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, is a little smoke-hazed bistro named Chez Paul. My entree of carpaccio of salmon was delicately sliced, wafer like. Béarnaise sauce accompanied my chateaubriand, along with a neat pile of crispy, roast potatoes, all heavenly. But the *pièce de résistance* was dessert – cloud-like profiteroles.

When night time descends on the city of love, I head for dinner at Bistrot Le Petit Troquet at 28 Rue de l'Exposition in the lovely, Invalides quarter. Owner Patrick is kept busy in the kitchen while his wife Dominique looks after the tiny dining room. The last time I dined there Dominique remembered me from my visit two years before. It was in this very dining room that I had my first taste of fresh foie gras. That memory will stay with me until the day I die. A generous slice of silken foie gras was marbled with quatre épices, just enough to flavour but not to dominate. This was served alongside a lightly toasted slice of *brioche*. The average price for dinner is approximately 32 euros, well justified for the quality and experience. The Eiffel Tower is a short stroll away and is the perfect way to end another exciting day in Paris.

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