Few cities evoke the same level of sentiment as the City of Light, the City of Love, Gay Paree. The iconography runs deep: baguettes; paint palettes; breton shirts and berets; supercilious waiters in white aprons. Most of Paris’s charms are so obvious that it hardly requires a guide to find them; the problem is how to create an itinerary in the face of its array of museums, dining spots, historical sites and independent boutiques.

01 First impressions: Whether you’re asking for a croissant or directions, don’t just launch straight into your request: it’s considered wildly impolite.

02 Banking on it: Paris’s Left and Right banks are not simply demarcated by geography: they represent different lifestyles. The Left is all art galleries and upscale cafés, the Right is more varied.

03 In vino veritas. Wine is the tipple of choice in Paris – in many bars and restaurants it’s cheaper than a soft drink. French people are partial to meeting for an apéro (a drink and a bite to eat) between 18.00 and 20.00.

04 Do your homework: Always look online or call ahead to check that the venue you want to visit is open. Most Parisian restaurants open five or six days a week but figuring out which do when is the rub.

05 Pick of the bunch: Paris’s pickpockets are predatory with tourists. Be particularly wary of young children bearing clipboards: it’s a distraction technique.

Hotels
Suite Française

1 Four Seasons Hotel George V Paris, Champs-Élysées (8e)
High-end luxury
Under the stewardship of François Dupré from 1928 to 1968, the hotel built up an impressive collection of 18th-century furniture and artwork that is now a hallmark of the establishment. 31 Avenue George V, 75008 +33 (0)1 4421 0300 fourseasons.com

2 Hotel Grand Amour, Gare du Nord (10e)
Arty lodgings with spice
This hip 42-room guesthouse combines the charm of a bed and breakfast with grand-hotel luxury and has interiors styled by graffiti artist Sarloua. Keep an eye out for his custom-designed genitalia-patterned carpet. 35 Rue de la Fidélité, 75010 +33 (0)1 4233 5510 hotelamourparis.fr

3 Hotel Providence, Republique (10e)
Boutique charisma
There are numerous theatres nearby so actors come to this eccentric and charming hotel for post-show drinks, making for a colourful crowd. 30 Rue Reni Boulanger, 75010 +33 (0)1 4534 3404 hotelprovidenceparis.com

Food and drink
Bon appétit

1 Le Clown Bar, Oberkampf (11e)
Playfully inventive cuisine
The belle époque-era interior with its painted circus figures somersaulting across the mirrored walls is a fitting backdrop for the culinary whirls and turns that chef Atsumi Sota takes with his creative, modern French à la carte menu.
114 Rue Amelot, 75011 +33 (0)1 4355 8778 clown-bar-paris.fr

2 Le Cave à Michel, Belleville (10e)
Lively tapas hotspot
In the evening this petite wine shop transforms into a standing-room-only space offering seasonal small plates heaped with grilled octopus, artichokes and Galician beef. 36 Rue Sainte-Marthe, 75010 +33 (0)1 4445 9447 lecaveaumichel.net

3 Barthélémy, Saint-Germain-des-Prés (7e)
Cheese-lover heaven
No fridges, branding or use-by dates can be found from Fromagerie Barthélemy, only wall-to-wall cheese. More than 200 varieties, mostly made from raw milk, are stored and released only when ready. 51 Rue de Grenelle, 75007 +33 (0)1 4222 8224

French Trotters, Le Marais (3e)
Modern staples
Founded in 2005 by husband and wife Clarent and Carole Dehlouz, French Trotters began as a multibrand shop featuring ready-to-wear and lifestyle labels. It later expanded into men’s and women’s wear with its own line specialising in simple, well-crafted and functional pieces. 18 Boulevard des Filles du Calvaire, 75011 +33 (0)1 5830 1237 frenchtrotters.fr

Maison Kitsuné, Le Marais (11e)
Eagerly stylish
Maison Kitsuné’s fourth Parisian shop is its most impressive. Upstairs you’ll find a refined range of men’s and women’s wear that includes trench coats, printed shirts and wool sweaters. Café Kitsuné provides a welcome pit-stop. 18 Boulevard des Filles du Calvaire, 75011 +33 (0)1 5830 1237 kitsune.fr

Vocabulary

Local lingo

01 A ta santé: To your health (cheers)
02 Balles: Quid/buck
03 Bisous bisous: Kisses
04 Fumer une clope: Have a smoke
05 L’addition: The bill
06 Salut: Hi or bye