



## TRAVELOGUE

# Delectable Paris

"Skip it!"

That was what the late Anthony Bourdain had to say about the Eiffel Tower.

"If you want the organic Paris experience, you've got to steer clear of the tourist hordes. Endless security checks, hours spent in queues, and elbowing your way through the masses does not make for the ideal holiday," was his argument.

Getting the most out of Paris, while still managing to avoid the worst of the crowds is no mean feat. In a city boasting the most sumptuous culinary heritage, my way out of the lines seemed clear. I took a page from Bourdain's book and went straight to the eateries.

A gastro-tour through the City of Lights is quite a tall order. Every street corner presented new temptations: bakeries promising delicate, colourful tarts; hot chocolate as dense as custard cream at a salon de thé; street carts turning out fresh Nutella-slathered crêpes.

My first order of business was the French bistro classic — steak frites. It's no secret that the French like their meat rare, and although I am resolved never to try their beef tartare, a dish comprising of marinated ground beef topped with a raw egg-yolk, I do enjoy a juicy pink-centred steak.

Order a well done in these parts, and you are sure to elicit some disgusted glares from your server!

At Le Relais de l'Entrecôte, a 59-year old institution, we were given no menu. Only one thing is served and has been served for decades — their signature entrecôte steaks, doused in a special green sauce and served with thin, crispy fries.

The meat was buttery, tender and the sauce nothing short of extraordinary. The place was quickly added to a mental note of places I would be returning to in subsequent trips.

Between then and my next meal, I thought I would turn my attention to the city's celebrated cafes.

Café Angelina's famous 'chocolat chaud' and signature Mont Blanc, a pastry made up of layers of meringue, whipped cream,

and chestnut cream vermicelli, draws in huge crowds, meaning long wait-times at the door.

Fortunately, there were no lines at the Angelina located in the Richelieu wing of the Louvre — a blessing as hours of gawking at art had put me in dire need of some refreshments. The hot chocolate was not overwhelmingly sweet, yet far too rich to finish by oneself.

For dinner, I headed to L'Avant Comptoir, a somewhat cramped hors d'oeuvres bar from celebrity chef Yves Camdeborde, located in the sixth arrondissement. It was



standing room only, but I was only too happy to give up the comfort of a table once I had tasted the offerings.

Smaller plates meant I could sample more, and I did not hold back. A veritable feast followed — beef carpaccio salad, strips of tagliatelle made of octopus and squid, deviled eggs with tuna, clams in a coconut cream sauce, deep fried chicken, ceviche and the communal hand-churned Bordier butter with delicious, rustic bread.

Stuffed, yet still craving dessert, I walked next to the nearby L'Éclair de Génie, a patisserie by pastry chef Christophe Adam. The shop focusses exclusively on éclairs,

with close attention paid to the appearance of the treats. A gold-flecked salted caramel and a glittering pistachio éclair later, I was happy to conclude that they tasted as good as they looked.

The next French speciality on my list was Confit de Canard — a dish of preserved duck slow-poached in goose fat. After a few bites of confit at Café de l'Industrie, my husband looked over and expressed the exact thought that was running through my head, "Does this not remind you of kacchi biryani?"

Duck may taste nothing like mutton, and the mild honey sauce on our plates was worlds away from the heat-packed masala of a biryani, but the melt-in-your-mouth quality of the meat had simultaneously reminded us of our favourite dish back home. Few things in life are as good as a well-made kacchi, and this duck came very close to the top spot.

Of course, I was not planning to leave Paris without trying the ubiquitous macaron. Luxury patisserie Laduree is widely credited with the worldwide popularity of the almond and meringue based cookies, and while they are inarguably delicious at this establishment, my personal favourites came from Pierre Hermé.

Known for mixing things up in the kitchen to create unusual flavours, Monsieur Hermé gave us such delights as Ispahan (a combination of litchi, rose and raspberry) and celeste (passion fruit, rhubarb and strawberry).

Unlike the proverbial mountain, the Eiffel Tower came to me. I was greeted with views of it everywhere I went; during a rooftop lunch at famed department store Galeries Lafayette, at the ideally-placed Café du Trocadero as I sipped my afternoon tea, or as I relished a chocolate croissant at Carette.

An overstuffed itinerary may seem unavoidable in Paris, but take it from me — it's better to go with an overstuffed belly.

By Tonima Hossain

Photo courtesy: Tonima Hossain

## BOARDING PASS

BY SHEEMA HOSSAIN



## Sweet tooth in Paris

People go to Paris for the Eiffel Tower, but my sister and I went for the desserts and chocolates.

We spent an entire day stomping through the cobbled streets of the city, hunting down sweets to wolf down. Here's how it went.

We started the day with ice cream from the famous Berthillon to fuel our day's quest. It's a tiny store, but you cannot miss it because of the long lines. We got the pleasantly flavoured pistachio ice cream and a rather tangy strawberry sorbet, mostly because the colours would look good on our Instagram feed.

Next stop, the sweet shops. Montmartre's Hansel and Gretel-esque 'La Cure Gourmande' is the stuff of dreams. The traditional sweet shop doles out candies in beautiful vintage style tin boxes. We got a box of souvenir nougats and were off to our next gastronomic adventure.

If you are ever in search of chocolate fit for a queen, head to Debaube & Gallais because that is literally what they used to do. They once supplied chocolates for Marie Antoinette herself, and their dark chocolate truffles are hands down one of the best I have ever had. Quite fittingly, they come in royal blue boxes.

It was time to pay due respect to the éclairs and macarons of Paris. The general consensus is that L'Éclair de Génie has the best éclairs so that is where we went. The day was almost drawing to an end, so we allowed ourselves just enough time to stop and savour that moment when layers of chocolate ganache, choux pastry, and vanilla speckled custard all melt into one. The macarons we got from Laduree in their gorgeous pastel shades neatly arranged in the iconic Laduree boxes, to be savoured later as an after dinner snack.

I was in love with Parisian desserts. Is this not what they meant when they said Paris is the city of love?