

Plenty to discover ... elsewhere

Paris wants to get tourists onto bikes and away from major sights.

PARIS, bristling with the bustling crowds of tourists around the Eiffel Tower and Louvre after the pandemic all but emptied the city of foreign holidaymakers, is now trying to get tourists onto bicycles and onto the road less travelled.

The French city's new "discovery tourism" campaign is designed to lead guests to more hidden attractions, shops and landmarks and at the same time relieve overcrowded districts like Montmartre and Marais, the tourism office in Paris announced in June.

The problem for the French

capital is that everyone wants to see the Eiffel Tower on their first visit. Only on subsequent trips are visitors usually keen to explore other aspects of Paris.

The city now wants to make other, less-explored parts of the capital more welcoming to tourists by supporting the development of new hotels in non-tourist districts and setting up numerous more stations for parking bicycles.

The city is planning around 180km of additional cycle paths to be created to make roads less daunting to foreign cyclists.



There is almost never a long queue to get into the Louvre in Paris these days. — AFP

The city announced that important tourist areas in Paris will also be redesigned to offer visitors more space in the future. This is planned in the vicinity of Notre-Dame Cathedral, which is to be restored by 2024 after the fire that ruined much of this national landmark.

The lower area of the Champs-Élysées boulevard is also set to

become more accommodating to tourists. Paris also wants to make the area around the Eiffel Tower and the nearby Trocadero Square more practical with features like luggage storage for tourists.

This plans come as tourism in Paris is rapidly picking up again after a major slowdown during the pandemic. After 38 million tourists in 2019, around 33 mil-

lion guests are expected this year, said the director general of the tourism office, Corinne Menegaux.

The city's more expensive hotels are already well occupied, and the influx from the United States is almost back to the level before the pandemic. One new trend is that visitors are staying a little longer in the city. — dpa

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PARIS, France has always been one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. It is usually the starting point to any avid traveller's European journey, alongside London, of course.

Where you can go instead



...of course. The city may be famous for the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, Notre Dame cathedral, the Champs-Élysées avenue, croissants, macarons and chic fashion, but in the past few years it has also become infamous for many other things, like pickpockets, scammers, and ... smelly subway stations.

Let's not forget, too, the huge crowds at the attractions mentioned above, with everyone waiting to get the "perfect" shot for social media.

It is still worth checking them out though, especially if you've never been to Paris and just want to experience what so many other travellers before you have. But visiting these touristy parts of Paris can actually be done in a single day, except maybe the Louvre, which needs to be experienced at leisure to better appreciate all the amazing art.

Not an art fan? Skip the Louvre then and maybe check out the Pere Lachaise Cemetery, the largest one in Paris. The cemetery is actually a major tourist attraction in the city, though perhaps not as widely advertised or promoted as the other places. The Pere Lachaise is famous because many celebrated artists, authors, musicians, politicians and other notable figures are buried here.

Some of these personalities include Irish poet/playwright Oscar Wilde, French novelists Marcel Proust and Honore de Balzac, American rocker Jim Morrison, American dancer Isadora Duncan, French singer Edith Piaf and even Polish composer Frederic Chopin. There's also a section of the cemetery dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, in particular the deportees who were sent to the Oranienburg and Sachsenhausen concentration camps in Germany.

If visiting a famous cemetery is not something you wish to do while on holiday, then you can



The Palace of Versailles has a fascinating 'hall of mirrors'. — Photos: Pixabay

check out some of these other attractions. Many of them are accessible either by train or bus/car, and would only take a few hours to get there from Paris, and back again.

Loire Valley

Two hours and 30 minutes by car from Paris

Take a day trip to the Loire Valley in central France to see some castles, sip on specialty wines and munch on rillettes, all of which are what the valley is famous for. There are three castles you can check out: Chateau de Cheverny, Chateau de Chambord and Chateau de Chenonceau or Ladies' Castle.

Giverny

One hour by train

Giverny is a quaint, picturesque town that's great for when you want to spend the day just relaxing. This is where the famous painter Claude Monet lived, and you can now visit his former family home. It is his garden that people flock to, as this was where Monet painted some of his well-known works, like the *Les Nymphéas*. The Museum Of Impressionism, located near the garden, draws millions of visitors each year but at least it isn't as

crowded as the Louvre.

Champagne region

Two hours by train

Is it a good idea to visit Champagne if you don't drink? Of course. You can check out the Reims Cathedral of Notre-Dame (it's a different Notre Dame cathedral); Troyes, a tiny town that resembles medieval France with cobbled lanes, Gothic churches and half-timbered buildings; and the Tau Palace, the former residence for French monarchs and a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Obviously, you can also go on wine tours here to visit famous winemakers like the Moët & Chandon cellars, House Of Mumm and Taittinger Champagne House.

Boulogne-Billancourt

40 minutes by car or Metro

The closest suburb to Paris, Boulogne-Billancourt is where you go to escape the city's Instagram-loving tourists. There are plenty of parks and lakes here, and three museums to explore: Musée Paul-Belmondo for sculptures, Musée des Années 30 for Art Deco works and Musée Albert-Kahn for unique collections of 19th century photographs, as well as beautiful gardens. This area is also where many of



French painter Monet's garden is just as beautiful as his artworks.

Europe's rich and famous have properties, so you could sit at a cafe and do some people watching, if that's something you enjoy doing.

Versailles

Between 40 and 55 minutes by Metro

Versailles is home to the Palace of Versailles, one of the grandest royal residences in all of Europe. The palace was "built" by the French king Louis XIV – whose reign was a whopping 72 years – with the help of more than 36,000 builders and craftsmen. Measuring 815ha in size, the palace is now a museum and is open to the public for visits, though it would probably take a whole day to explore every corner of the estate. There are numerous gardens, a park and the main building to visit (with 2,300 rooms!); make sure you don't miss the fantastic "hall of mirrors". Within the estate you can also book a table at celebrated chef Alain Ducasse's restaurant Ore. Otherwise, head to La Mangette, an eatery which changes its menu every single day or Le Sept, a pub which serves nice grub.

Chartres

Around one hour by train

Here's another place with amazing Gothic architecture, which also has its own Notre-Dame cathedral

(known in English as the Chartres Cathedral). The 12th century cathedral is a Unesco World Heritage Site, and it's not hard to see why it was given this status as the building is so well preserved, with plenty of its original stained glass windows still intact.

Normandy

Around three hours by car, bus or train

When you're done with Paris, make your way to Normandy for a change of pace, and some lessons on World War II. Visit the Caen Memorial Museum, the D-Day beaches involved in the Normandy landing operations, and the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, which honours the American troops who died in Europe during the war. There are 26 military cemeteries in the area that represent each nation involved in the war, but the American cemetery is the most visited one.

Other attractions include the Unesco World Heritage Site Mont Saint-Michel, Rouen old town (which has a, you guessed it, Notre-Dame cathedral) where Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake, and the seaside resort of Etretat.

As Normandy is a coastal region, don't skip on any meals here, especially if you love seafood, and cheese.