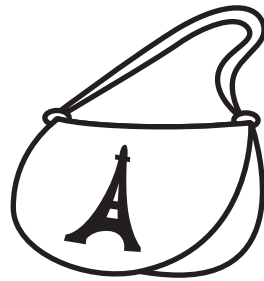


Best Buys
to
French Chic

5th Edition



By Rachel Kaplan

About the Author Rachel Kaplan

A graduate of the Lycée Français de New York and the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Rachel has been living and shopping in Paris since 1993. Today, she is the president of French Links Tours (www.frenchlinks.com) — a cultural tourism company based in Paris, now in its 12th year of business.

She is also president of Paris Chic Shopping, which offers customized shopping tours and a red carpet concierge service. Her shopping tours led her to write *Best Buys to French Chic*, the first electronic guide to shopping in Paris sold both as an e-book and in print. “A tour guide can make or break a vacation, which is why Rachel Kaplan’s tours are so sought after,” writes *Travel & Leisure* magazine.

Following the success of French Links Tours corporate events, Rachel created Events & Company (www.eventsandcompany.com), which specializes in organizing customized weddings, conferences, seminars, and corporate entertainment in Paris and other parts of France. Among her blue-chip clients Rachel can count Disney Corporation, Diesel Jeans, Parker Aerospace, RSM International and Eurogroup. Rachel’s passion for art, history and culture has led her to write four books published by Harry N. Abrams Inc., including *Little-Known Museums In and Around Paris*, now in its fourth edition. An internationally published journalist, Rachel’s articles have appeared in *Art & Antiques*, *Antiques*, *Art & Frame Review*, *British Heritage*, *Elle*, *Departures*, *France Today*, *Paris Notes*, *This City Paris*, *French Vogue*, *Traditional Homes* and *Victoria*.

Rachel’s tours are a labor of love. All of her multifaceted cultural programs can be booked directly through www.frenchlinks.com. Now her customized shopping tours and this electronic book can be purchased through www.parischicshopping.com. What is unique about Rachel is that she not only loves to shop, she does it with principles. Unlike many shopping tour guides, she categorically refuses to take commissions from any dealer or shop in the city.

Rachel invites you to contact her at chic@parischicshopping.com.





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Why This Shopping Guide Is Different

I have tried to write this shopping guide with a real-life reader in mind—one who doesn't necessarily have a size 4 figure, breast implants and an unlimited spending budget. While she may read *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, she likes to spend her money wisely, and not on designer shoes that she will toss after a single season. This real-life reader is no different from myself, a working woman, with a limited budget, an overcommitted schedule, and little time to shop for herself. She is either on her first trip to Paris with her husband or a girlfriend, or she has opted to rent an apartment for a month, or she has, through fate or plan, become a long-term Parisian resident.



Although Paris is the capital of the world's fifth largest economy, and is a thriving international city, with its share of McDonald's and Adidas outlets, it also has its own language, a new currency, and a very old civilization that is quite different from our own.



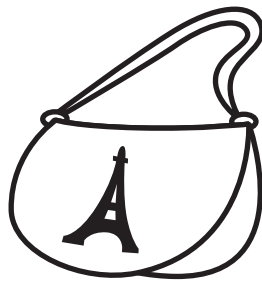
As a long-term resident of Paris, one who has lived in both modest and upscale rent districts, I have gained a privileged knowledge of the city, that I would like to share with the reader of this guide. Through my own trial and error, I have found a way to save money in one of the world's most expensive cities by shopping like a Parisian. That means shopping for the entire family, and not just for myself. As a tour guide, I have tried to appeal to different tastes and budgets—and am as familiar with Armani and Chanel, as with Monoprix, France's idea of Target. Most of all, I want my reader to discover that Paris has hundreds of stores where you can find lovely things at very attractive prices. You just have to know where to look.

My intention with this book is to help maximize the brief time most visitors have for shopping. At the same time, I encourage you to take time to explore at least one or two less familiar neighborhoods during your visit, areas that will show you a different sight of Paris than what you have come to expect. Although Paris is the most visited city in the world—you have to share elbow-room with 30 million annual visitors—it still has hundreds of shopping secrets to divulge.

In this guide, you will also learn the inside scoop on shopping etiquette, which will help you to obtain better service from merchants, as well as discover where to find wonderful bargains in clothes, fragrances and fashion accessories. The more adventurous will learn the rudiments of exploring not just the Flea market, but also the fabric and notions stores near Montmartre, and the gourmet food and cookware stores near the Halles district. You will learn how the thrifty French housewife takes advantage of market specials at the weekly food markets, and where to shop for quality convenience foods. Best of all, you will discover a city that has shops for plus sizes, for English-speaking readers and writers, as well as for students on a limited budget.

The aim of this guide is to assist the adventurous traveler and long-term resident (whose French may be far from perfect), on how to make the most of the city's services and retail outlets, without going broke.


In this guide, you have lots of space for your own notes and comments, as well as discoveries. I hope you will share them by writing to me at **chic@parischicshopping.com**.






What Makes Shopping in Paris So Special

Since the first time I visited Paris, I have been enchanted with its stores and boutiques, which are definitely part of the city's beauty, charm and elegance. Frequently imitated, but never duplicated, they are an indispensable part of any visit to the city. It's not surprising that everyone remarks on the French capital's enticing shop windows—they are truly three-dimensional works of art.



Perhaps it's because the trained eye that has created these commercial still-lives is the same one that gave the world the Tuileries and Luxembourg Gardens, the marble-topped café table and woven-rattan chair, the demi-tasse coffee cup, and the bite-size dark chocolate that is served with coffee in the city's finer restaurants and cafés. The French always say that the art is in the detail, and no one would disagree that Paris remains a global arbiter of taste. No wonder that in a recent issue of *Travel & Leisure* magazine, Louis Vuitton's American designer Marc Jacobs summed up what many people feel about Paris: "I look in every shop window and I find everything so appealing, so enticing—even things I have no real interest in buying," he says. "I find myself mesmerized."



After all, every day these shop windows have to bear the raking, hypercritical eye of the Parisians—and believe me, to win them over is no small feat! Since the French do not tend to be impulse buyers, these stores have to withstand the scrutiny of knowledgeable comparison-shopping. And competition can be fierce! Not only does Paris seem to have far more shops than any other global capital, but many of these stores offer wares that are equally tempting and enthralling.


What makes Paris unique is that the French take great pride in dressing with taste and style even on a limited budget. That is why you can find leading international designers selling their ideas both on the Avenue Montaigne (the most exclusive shopping street in Paris) and in mail-order catalogs.




There Are Unspoken Rules

The aim of this guide is to present a view of Paris that is authentic and intriguing—not filled with the clichés we know all too well. Whether you’re buying chocolates or a dress that you simply cannot live without, I hope you discover French savoir-faire, so your shopping adventure is both special and memorable.

I can still recall those early days in Paris, when I felt like a novice when it came to shopping. I was confused by the sizes, the differences in food packaging (I had never bought irradiated milk or soups, for instance), and the pricing. I also had different expectations regarding service and convenience. I soon discovered the customer often has to defer to the store’s unspoken rules—yet, when you learn to do so, shopping can be both pleasant and rewarding.






What helped me most was to watch how the Parisians conducted themselves and were received in stores. I noticed that when entering most shops in Paris, I was entering a public-private space, where certain unspoken rules had to be respected. I couldn’t walk into a store with food or drinks, I couldn’t touch the store displays nor could I interrupt a sales person in the midst of a sale to ask a question. In other words, I couldn’t be what the French call “the ugly American.”



Adaptation Isn’t Always Easy


Born in a country used to “instant gratification,” with 24-hour, seven-day-a-week shopping convenience, it wasn’t easy adapting to a different, more laid-back Parisian rhythm. When the staff did not rush over to me, I often took umbrage. When a garment wasn’t altered correctly, I would get annoyed. After all, wasn’t the customer supposed to be treated like royalty?

I soon learned that the highly independent French don’t necessarily welcome help from the sales staff. As informed consumers, they prefer to do comparison-shopping, and tend to make purchasing decisions more slowly and methodically. If French people take more time making up their mind before they make a purchase—particularly for high-ticket items—it is partly because many retailers refuse store returns or exchanges. The only exceptions to this rule are the major department stores or retailers selling appliances with guarantees.




Be Careful and Organized When You Shop

When you discover the joy of window-shopping in Paris, you can forget the city has pickpockets. A pickpocket loves nothing better than a distracted tourist. Don't run around with wads of cash. **Don't carry too many credit cards. Be sure to carry a phone number that allows you to cancel them immediately, should they get stolen.** If you withdraw money from a cash machine, be sure no one is behind you trying to see your four-digit code. Never leave a paper receipt in the cash machine, because you may live to regret it. Professional thieves know how to access your account information and potentially drain your account. To be even safer, keep credit cards and bank debit cards separate from your wallet. **Carry a copy of your passport,** and leave the original in the hotel drawer or safe. Ditto for airline tickets and other valuables.



Always shop with a street guide and a metro map to get yourself oriented. Maximize your time by using this guide, which gives you a chance to spend wisely and well. Take a list and a measuring tape in meters and inches should you need to use one. It might be a good idea to take a red or a green pen to make notes in your guide and underline stores that appeal. If your time is limited, explore one shopping neighborhood, or one or two department stores, instead of exhausting yourself by running all over town aimlessly. If you are afraid to use the metro, take cabs instead, or hire a limousine service through Paris Chic Shopping. You will be glad you did.




The French are not impulse buyers. They look over the merchandise carefully before making a final purchase. They make sure that the garment isn't soiled, ripped or poorly made, or that the antique that caught their eye isn't scratched or broken. By emulating the French way of shopping, you can quickly become a wiser consumer, who can ferret out bargains and shopping opportunities that other tourists miss. That's one of the benefits of shopping like the French do. And this guide will teach you how to do it.




How to Maximize Your Shopping Trip

What if you only have a limited amount of time in Paris to both shop and tour? What if you have certain shopping goals? It's critical to be organized and prepared ahead of time. While it's interesting to read up on the latest Paris trends, it's probably more useful to read a shopping guide before you go. This way you won't feel like a "bull in a china shop." If you have the budget and don't have the language, by all means hire a guide to accompany you to places that you're unlikely to find on your own.



For instance, one group of visitors from Cincinnati found that by hiring a guide, they were able to uncover a shoe boutique with unique designs at excellent prices, find several good outlets for antique jewellery, as well as several resale shops with designer scarves and pocket books in mint condition at a fraction of the retail price at duty-free outlets, not to mention department stores.






Make Sure to Plan Ahead

My first suggestion is to make a plan of what you wish to accomplish, especially if your time is limited. Know that in order to get a full overview of the Paris flea markets, you need to set aside at least a day.

If you wish to shop quickly and with ease, don't do so with children. They are likely to become bored or irritable, especially when their needs and interests are not being addressed. I still recall with a shudder a terrible two hours that some high-energy teenagers were forced to spend in a print shop as their parents were rummaging through piles of antique engravings. While they were overjoyed with their finds, the kids were anything but.

What if you are an impulse buyer, an intrepid explorer of foreign territory? With this guide, you are also able to discover the hidden byways of Paris, as well as the touristy shopping areas. If you are just planning to meander and buy what strikes your fancy, all you need are some credit cards, a bank debit card in case you run out of




cash, and a map of the city and the metro system, often provided free of charge by your hotel. It's a good idea to stash your money in a safe place, especially if you don't know Paris well. If you look and behave too much like an innocent tourist, you will become easy prey for pickpockets, especially on the Paris metro (See section on pickpockets on page 10).


If You're Planning to Spend a Lot

Most important: If you are planning to spend a substantial amount of money abroad, it is first advisable to call your credit card company and issuing bank ahead of time to inform them of your plans. Often visitors' charge cards are blocked—albeit for their own protection—when they have neglected to do so. There's nothing more unnerving or embarrassing.

Don't Pack a Ton of Clothes



If you are planning a week-long trip to Paris, which is usually the average stay, don't pack a lot of clothes and shoes. It's best to stick to some limited combination of slacks and blazers, handsome walking shoes, and a lined raincoat. Don't forget an umbrella - Paris gets a lot of rain. You can always dress up your outfit with accessories such as scarves and beads. Avoid taking precious jewelry, hairdryers with transformers (most three and four-star hotels offer them anyway), and tons of cosmetics. **Be sure to bring a collapsible suitcase or carryon bag to cart your precious goodies home!**



If you are on a special diet and medical program, don't forget to take your drugs and a menu minder so that you can eat the foods on your diet. This menu minder contains the names of all French foods and dishes in English and is easily available in most travel book stores as well as through Amazon.com.

Outfitting Yourself in a Day

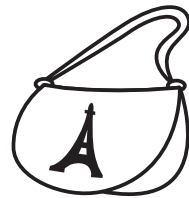
If you happen to travel to Paris several times a year on business, you have a unique opportunity of seeing the latest fashions and comparing them with what you see in stores back home. Recently, a guest from Vancouver, Canada, extended her business trip in Paris to include a day-long shopping tour. "I couldn't find an appropriate

prom dress for my daughter either in Vancouver or in New York—and naturally thought I might find one in Paris at a good price.” In fact, she ended up buying the first gown she saw—a long rose-colored silk dress by Tara Jarmon for around 240 €.

Also on her list were two evening bags (one for her, one for her daughter), a pants suit that she could wear without wrinkling it, a fine white cotton blouse, a pair of slacks that fit her newly slimmed-down figure, several pashminas, as well as an evening scarf and a brooch to go with her new silk dinner suit. With a clear plan, and only a 30-minute stop for lunch, she found it all in just one day with the aid of a bilingual guide—much to her satisfaction.

If your stay in Paris is brief, it’s more productive to discover a single shopping district near your hotel, or to shop a major department store such as Printemps, the Bazaar de L’Hotel de Ville, the Galeries Lafayette, or the Bon Marché. Here you will find a broad selection of most French labels in clothing, jewelry and accessories under a single roof. Not only will you save time, you will also save energy and shoe leather.


Knowing how hard it is to put a great outfit together, it is nice to know that you can still do so in Paris in the span of an eight-hour day, provided that you focus on your goal and don’t get sidetracked. Many of us can get distracted by the appetizing windows and often end up buying things that we will never use. So when you set out for a shopping tour in Paris, ask yourself: “Do I really need this? Will I ever use it?” When you have successfully answered that question, you will be on the road to maximizing your shopping trip to Paris.





Savings on Luxury Goods

While it is true that you can spend a bundle on French luxury goods in Paris, it's nice to know that if you are bent on getting that Louis Vuitton pocketbook or that Chanel evening gown, the French capital is still your best bet when it comes to saving money. **It is important to remember that 19.6% of the ticket price of any purchased item (except for food and books) is a Value-Added Tax.** As a foreigner living outside the European Union, you qualify to get a certain percentage of this tax deducted from the purchase price of any garment, fashion accessory, or houseware, provided you spend a minimum of 175€ in a single retail outlet. The ticket price is often an additional five to ten percent less when you eliminate overseas transportation. No wonder so many visitors come to Paris to buy shoes by Tod's or Manolo Blahnik and scarves and pocketbooks by Hermès. (I have one friend who has a list of comparison prices on Hermès Kelly bags in New York and in Paris, and invariably places her order for a new bag in Paris. Even with shipping to New Jersey, a substantial savings is to be had).



Other Ways To Save on Designer Goods

Further savings can be had when you purchase designer fashions in stores that offer attractive discounts on last season's merchandise. If you stick to classic designs—most of us do—you can come home with some very attractive bargains. The retailers that carry this merchandise are located in non-touristy neighbourhoods. With this guide, you will learn where they are.

Another way Parisians have learned to save money on designer clothes and accessories is to haunt elegant resale shops, most of which are located in high-rent districts. Here you can find gently used or nearly new merchandise by such designers as Sonia Rykiel, Yves Saint Laurent (the original company) and Christian Lacroix, to name a few. Expect savings of up to 75% on many of these designer's wares.