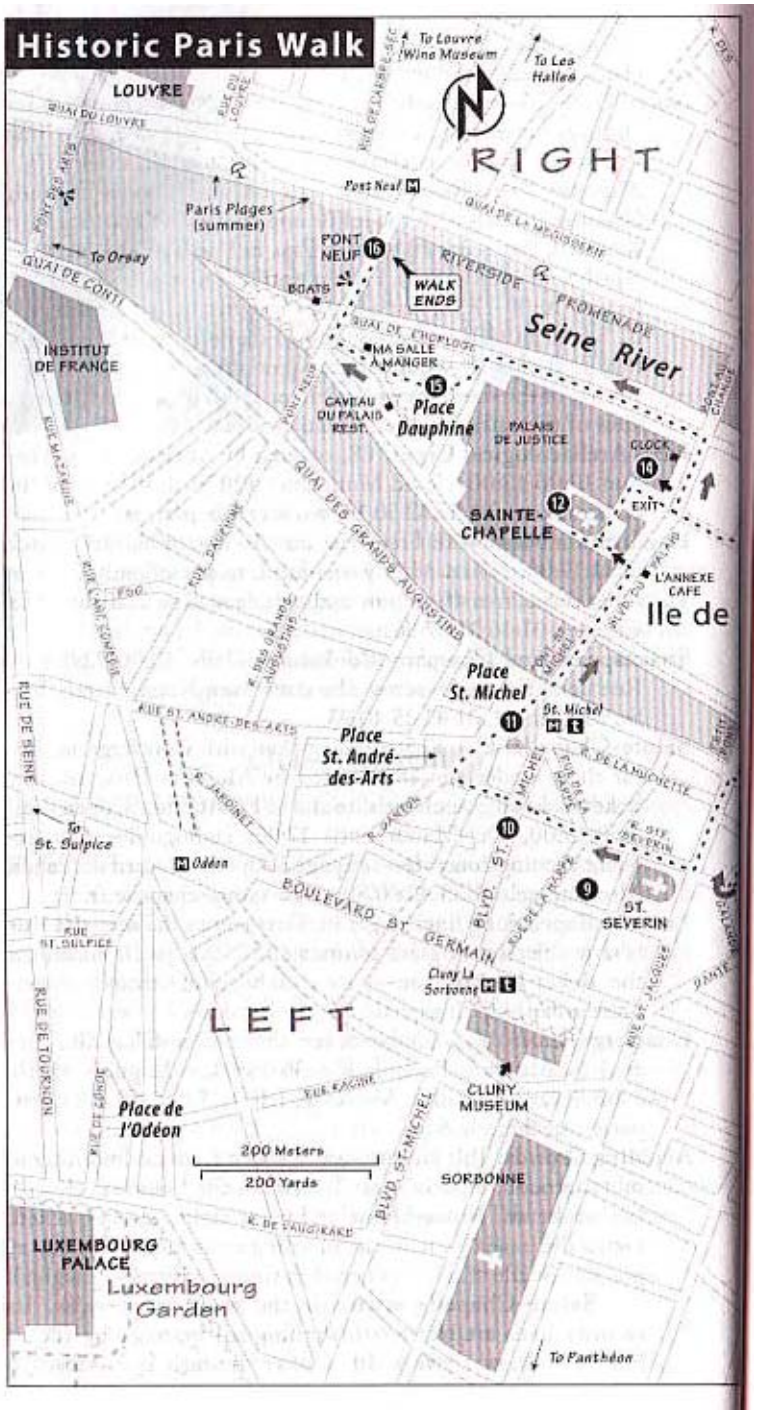
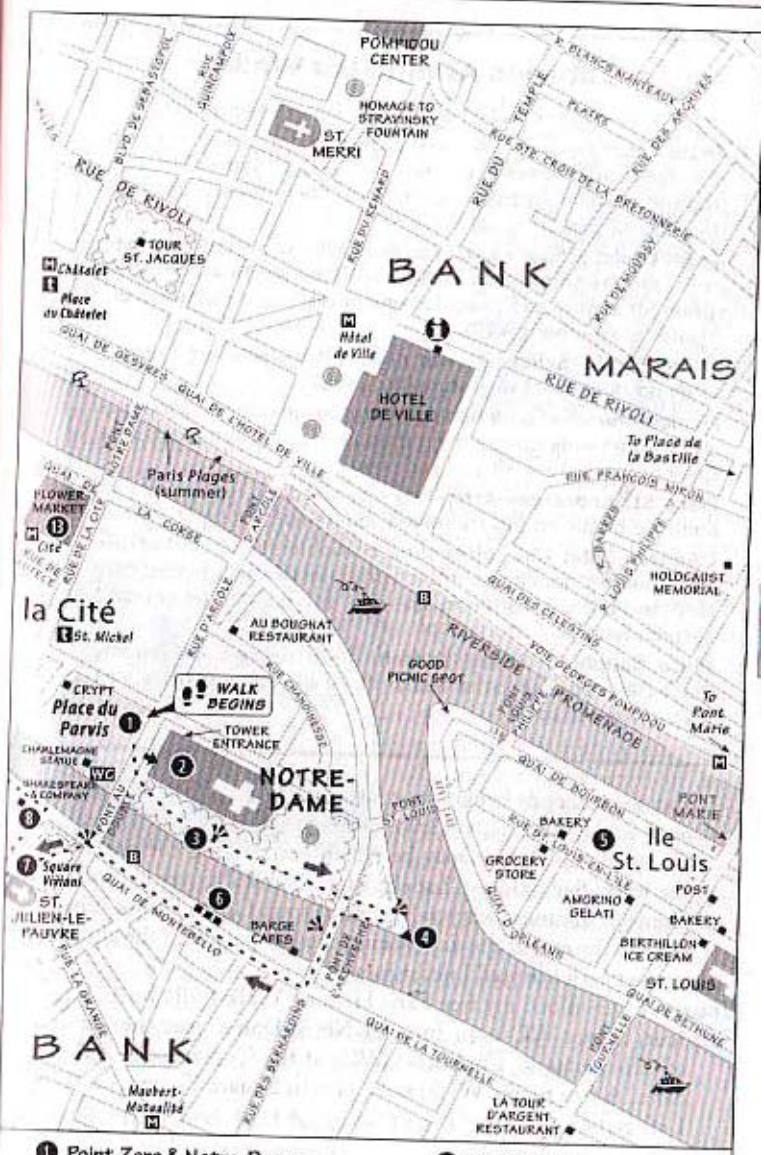
HISTORIC PARIS WALK

Ile de la Cité and the Latin Quarter

The Walk Begins

• *Start at Notre-Dame Cathedral on the island in the Seine River, the physical and historic bull's-eye of your Paris map. The closest Métro stops are Cité, Hôtel de Ville, and St. Michel, each a short walk away.*


Historic Paris Walk
LOUVRE
To Louvre (Wine Museum)
To Les Halles
RIGHT
Pont Neuf
Paris Plages (summer)
To Orsay
QUAI DE CONTI
PONT NEUF 16
BOATS
WALK ENDS
RIVERSIDE PROMENADE
Seine River
INSTITUT DE FRANCE
MA SALLE A MANGER
CAVEAU DU PALAIS REST.
15 Place Dauphine
PALAIS DE JUSTICE
CLOCK 14
EXIT
SAINTE-CHAPELLE 12
L'ANNEXE CAFE
Ile de
QUAI DES GRANDS AUGUSTINS
Place St. Michel
St. Michel
11
Place St. André-des-Arts
RUE DE SEINE
To St. Sulpice
Odéon
10
9
ST. SEVERIN
BOULEVARD ST. GERMAIN
Cluny La Sorbonne
LEFT
CLUNY MUSEUM
Place de l'Odéon
200 Meters
200 Yards
SORBONNE
LUXEMBOURG PALACE
Luxembourg Garden
To Panthéon



1. Point Zero & Notre-Dame
2. Notre-Dame Interior
3. Notre-Dame Side View
4. Deportation Memorial
5. Ile St. Louis
6. Left Bank Booksellers
7. Medieval Paris: St. Julien-le-Pauvre
8. Shakespeare & Co. Bookstore
9. St. Séverin
10. Boulevard St. Michel
11. Place St. Michel
12. Sainte-Chapelle
13. Cité Métro Stop
14. Conciergerie
15. Place Dauphine
16. Pont Neuf & the Seine

NOTRE-DAME AND NEARBY

• On the square in front of the cathedral, stand far enough back to take in the whole facade. Find the circular window in the center.

For centuries, the main figure in the Christian pantheon has been Mary, the mother of Jesus. Catholics petition her in times of trouble to gain comfort, and to ask her to convince God to be compassionate with them. This church is dedicated to "Our Lady" (Notre Dame), and there she is, cradling God, right in the heart of the facade, surrounded by the halo of the rose window. Though the church is massive and imposing, it has always stood for the grace and compassion of Mary, the "mother of God."

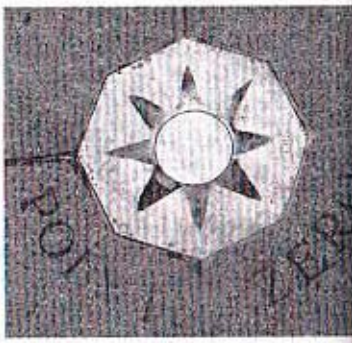
Imagine the faith of the people who built this cathedral. They broke ground in 1163 with the hope that someday their great-great-great-great-great-great grandchildren might attend the dedication Mass, which finally took place two centuries later, in 1345. Look up the 200-foot-tall bell towers and imagine a tiny medieval community mustering the money and energy for construction. Master masons supervised, but the people did much of the grunt work themselves for free—hauling the huge stones from distant quarries, digging a 30-foot-deep trench to lay the foundation, and treading like rats on a wheel designed to lift the stones up, one by one. This kind of backbreaking, arduous manual labor created the real hunchbacks of Notre-Dame.

• "Walk this way" toward the cathedral, and view it from the bronze plaque on the ground (30 yards from the central doorway).

❶ Point Zero and Notre-Dame

You're standing at the center of France, the point from which all distances are measured. It was also the center of Paris 2,300 years ago, when the Parisii tribe fished where the east-west river crossed a north-south road. The Romans conquered the Parisii and built their Temple of Jupiter where Notre-Dame stands today (52 BC). Then as now, the center of religious power faced the center of political power (once the Roman military, today the police station, at the far end of the square). When Rome fell, the Germanic Franks

sealed their victory by replacing the temple with the Christian church of St. Etienne in the sixth century.



In fact, much of the history of Paris is directly beneath your feet. Two thousand years of dirt and debris have raised the city's altitude. The nearby **Archaeological Crypt** has the remains of the many structures that have stood on this spot in the center of Paris: Roman buildings that surrounded the temple of Jupiter; a wall that didn't keep the Franks out; the main medieval road that once led grandly up the square to Notre-Dame; and even (wow) a 19th-century sewer. The museum entrance is 100 yards in front of Notre-Dame's entrance; for more on the crypt, see the listing on page 47.

The grand equestrian statue (to your right as you face the church) is of Charlemagne ("Charles the Great," 742-814), King of the Franks, whose reign marked the birth of France as a nation. He briefly united Europe and was crowned the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800, but after his death, the kingdom was divided into what would become modern France and Germany.

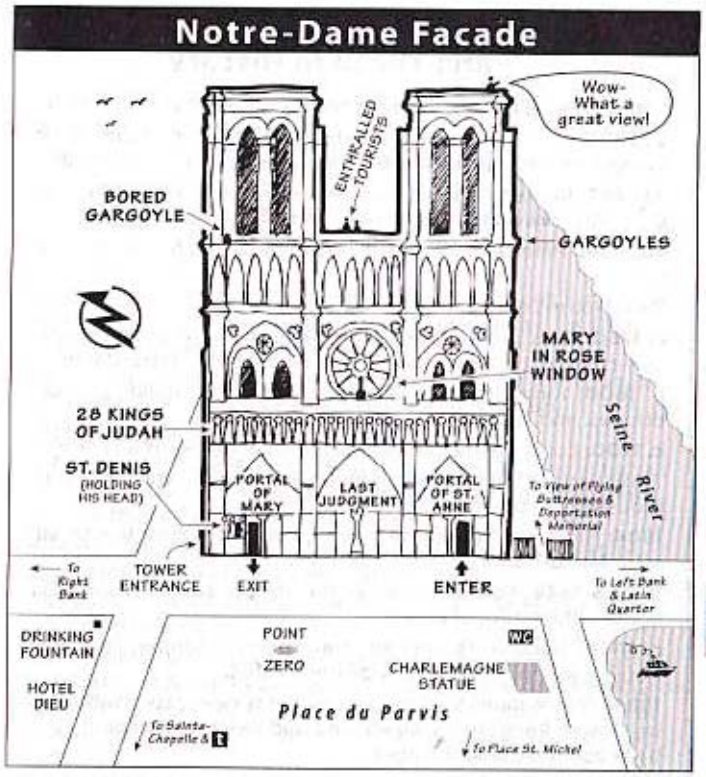
Before its renovation 150 years ago, this square was much smaller. The church's huge bell towers rose above a tangle of small, ramshackle medieval buildings, inspiring Victor Hugo's story of a deformed bell-ringer who could look down on all of Paris.

Looking two-thirds of the way up Notre-Dame's left tower, those with binoculars or good eyes can find Paris' most photographed gargoyle (see drawing on next page). Propped on his elbows on the balcony rail, he watches all the tourists in line.

• *Now turn your attention to the rest of the...*

Notre-Dame Facade

• *Look at the left doorway, and to the left of the door, find the statue with his head in his hands.*



St. Denis

The man with the misplaced head is St. Denis, the city's first bishop and patron saint. He stands among statues of other early Christians who helped turn pagan Paris into Christian Paris.

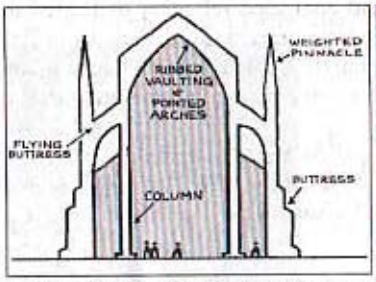
Sometime in the third century, Denis came here from Italy to convert the Parisii. He settled here on the Ile de la Cité, back when there was a Roman temple on this spot and Christianity was suspect. Denis proved so successful at winning converts that the Romans' pagan priests got worried. Denis was beheaded as a warning to those forsaking the Roman gods. But those early Christians were hard to keep down. The man who would become St. Denis got up, tucked his head under his arm, headed north, paused at a fountain to wash it off, and continued until he found just the right place to meet his maker:

❸ Notre-Dame Side View

Alongside the church you'll notice many of the elements of Gothic: pointed arches, the lacy stone tracery of the windows, pinnacles, statues on rooftops, a lead roof, and a pointed steeple covered with the prickly "flames" (Flamboyant Gothic) of the Holy Spirit. Most distinctive of all are the flying buttresses. These 50-foot stone "beams" that stick out of the church were the key to the complex Gothic architecture. The pointed arches we saw inside cause the weight of the roof to push outward rather than downward. The "flying" buttresses support the roof by pushing back inward. Gothic architects were masters at playing architectural forces against each other to build loftier and loftier churches, opening the walls for stained-glass windows. The Gothic style was born here in Paris.

Picture Quasimodo (the fictional hunchback) limping around along the railed balcony at the base of the roof among the "gargoyles." These grotesque beasts sticking out from pillars and buttresses represent souls caught between heaven and earth. They also function as rainspouts (from the same French root word as "gargle") when there are no evil spirits to battle.

The Neo-Gothic 300-foot spire is a product of the 1860 reconstruction of the dilapidated old church. Victor Hugo's book *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831) inspired a young architecture student named Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc to dedicate his career to a major renovation in



It takes 13 tourists to build a Gothic church: one steeple, six columns, and six buttresses.

Gothic style. Find Viollet-le-Duc at the base of the spire among the green apostles and evangelists (visible as you approach the back end of the church). The apostles look outward, blessing the city, while the architect (at top) looks up the spire, marveling at his fine work.

• *Behind Notre-Dame, cross the street and enter through the iron gate into the park at the tip of the island. (If this gate is closed, you can still enter the park 30 yards to the left.) Look for the stairs and head down to reach the...*

❶ Deportation Memorial (Mémorial de la Déportation)

This memorial to the 200,000 French victims of the Nazi concentration camps (1940-1945) draws you into their experience. France was quickly overrun by Nazi Germany, and Paris spent the war years under Nazi occupation. Jews and dissidents were rounded up and deported—many never returned.

As you descend the steps, the city around you disappears. Surrounded by walls, you have become a prisoner. Your only freedom is your view of the sky and the tiny glimpse of the river below. Enter the dark, single-file chamber up ahead. Inside, the circular plaque in the floor reads, "They went to the end of the earth and did not return."

The hallway stretching in front of you is lined with 200,000 lighted crystals, one for each French citizen who died. Flickering at the far end is the eternal flame of hope. The tomb of the unknown deportee lies at your feet. Above, the inscription reads, "Dedicated to the living memory of the 200,000 French deportees shrouded by the night and the fog, exterminated in the Nazi concentration camps." The side rooms are filled with triangles—reminiscent of the identification patches inmates were forced to wear—each bearing the name of a concentration camp.

From the side room on the left, stairs lead up to Rooms 1 and 2 where you'll find a powerful exhibit on life in a concentration camp (vividly described in English). You'll circle around to where stairs lead back to the room of 200,000 crystals.

Above the exit as you leave is the message you'll find at many other Holocaust sites: "Forgive, but never forget."

• *To exit, climb the same stairs you descended. Before leaving the memorial park, look across the river (north) to the island called...*

❺ Ile St. Louis

If Ile de la Cité is a tugboat laden with the history of Paris, it's towing this classy little residential dinghy, laden only with high-rent apartments, boutiques, characteristic restaurants, and famous ice cream shops.

Ile St. Louis wasn't developed until much later than Ile de la Cité (17th century). What was a swampy mess is now harmonious Parisian architecture and one of Paris' most exclusive neighborhoods.

Look upstream (east) to the bridge (Pont Tournelle) that links Ile St. Louis with the Left Bank (which is now on your right). Where the bridge meets the Left Bank, you'll find one of Paris' most exclusive restaurants, La Tour d'Argent (with a flag flying from the rooftop). This restaurant was the inspiration for the movie *Ratatouille*. Because the top floor has floor-to-ceiling windows, your evening meal comes with glittering views—and a golden price (allow €200 minimum, though you get a photo of yourself dining elegantly with Notre-Dame floodlit in the background).

Ile St. Louis is a lovely place for an evening stroll (for details, see page 503). If you won't have time to come back later, consider taking a brief detour across the pedestrian bridge, Pont St. Louis, to explore this little island.

• *From the Deportation Memorial, cross the bridge to the Left Bank. Turn right and walk along the river, toward the front end of Notre-Dame. If you need a place to picnic, stairs detour down to the riverbank. At times, you may find barges housing restaurants with great cathedral views docked here.*

LEFT BANK

❻ Left Bank Booksellers

You've reached the Left Bank. The view of the church from here, across the river, is one of Europe's great sights.

The Rive Gauche, or the Left Bank of the Seine—"left" if you were floating downstream—is old Paris at its most atmospheric. This side of the river still has many of the twisting lanes and narrow buildings of medieval times. (The Right Bank is more modern and business-oriented, with wide boulevards and stressed Parisians in suits.)

Here along the riverbank, the "big

business" is secondhand books, displayed in the green metal stalls on the parapet. These literary entrepreneurs pride themselves on their easygoing style. With flexible hours and virtually no overhead, they run their businesses as they have since medieval times.

These booksellers (or *bouquinistes;* boo-keen-eest) have been a Parisian fixture since the mid-1500s, when such shops and stalls lined most of the bridges in Paris. In 1557, these merchants ran afoul of the authorities for selling forbidden Protestant pamphlets in then-Catholic Paris. After the Revolution, business boomed when entire libraries were liberated from rich nobles.

Today, the waiting list to become one of Paris' 250 *bouquinistes* is eight years. Each *bouquiniste* is allowed four boxes, and the most-coveted spots are awarded based on seniority. Rent is around €100 per year. *Bouquinistes* are required to paint their boxes a standard green and stay open at least four days a week, or they lose their spot. Notice how they guard against the rain by wrapping everything in plastic. And yes, they do leave everything inside when they lock up at night; metal bars and padlocks keep things safe. Though their main items may be vintage books, these days tourists prefer posters and magnets.

• *When you reach the bridge (Pont au Double) that crosses to the front of Notre-Dame, veer left across the street and find a small park called Square Viviani (fill your water bottle from fountain on left).*

Angle across the square and pass by Paris' oldest inhabitant—an acacia tree nicknamed Robinier, after the guy who planted it in 1602. Imagine that this same tree might once have shaded the Sun King, Louis XIV. Just beyond the tree you'll find the small rough-stone church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre. Leave the park, walking past the church, to tiny Rue Galande.

❼ Medieval Paris

Picture Paris in 1250, when the church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre was still new. Notre-Dame was nearly done (so they thought), Sainte-Chapelle had just opened, the university was expanding human knowledge, and Paris was fast becoming a prosperous industrial and commercial

center. The area around the church and along Rue Galande gives you some of the medieval feel of ramshackle architecture and old houses leaning every which way. In medieval days, people were piled on top of each other, building at all angles, as they scrambled for this prime real estate near the main commercial artery of the day—the Seine. The smell of fish competed with the smell of neighbors in this knot of humanity.

Narrow dirt (or mud) streets sloped from here down into the mucky Seine until the 19th century, when modern quays and embankments cleaned everything up.

• Now, return toward the river, walking past the church and park on the cobbled lane. Turn left on Rue de la Bûcherie and drop into the...

❽ Shakespeare and Company Bookstore

In addition to hosting butchers and fishmongers, the Left Bank has been home to scholars, philosophers, and poets since medieval times. This funky bookstore—a reincarnation of the original shop from the 1920s on Rue de l'Odéon—has picked up the literary torch. Sylvia Beach, an American with a passion for free thinking, opened Shakespeare and Company for the post-WWI Lost Generation, who came to Paris to find themselves. American writers flocked to the city for the cheap rent, fleeing the uptight, Prohibition-era United States. Beach's bookstore was famous as a meeting place for Paris' expatriate literary elite. Ernest Hemingway borrowed books from it regularly. James Joyce struggled to find a publisher for his now-classic novel *Ulysses*—until Sylvia Beach published it. George Bernard Shaw, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound also got their English fix at her shop.

Today, the bookstore carries on that literary tradition—the owner, Sylvia, is named after the original store's founder. Struggling writers are given free accommodations in tiny rooms with views of Notre-Dame. Explore—the upstairs has a few seats, cots, antique typewriters, and cozy nooks. Downstairs, travelers enjoy a great selection of used English books—including my *Paris* and *France* guidebooks. Their cozy coffee shop sits next door.

Notice the green water fountain (1900) in front of the bookstore (see photo, previous page), one of the many in Paris donated by the English philanthropist Sir Richard Wallace. The hooks below the caryatids once held metal mugs for drinking the water before the age of plastic.

• *Continue to Rue du Petit-Pont and turn left. This bustling north-south boulevard (which becomes Rue St. Jacques) was the Romans' busiest street 2,000 years ago, with chariots racing in and out of the city. (Roman-iacs can view remains from the third-century baths, and a fine medieval collection, at the nearby Cluny Museum.*

A block south of the Seine, turn right at the Gothic church of St. Séverin and walk into the Latin Quarter.

❾ St. Séverin

Don't ask me why, but building this church took a century longer than building Notre-Dame. This is Flamboyant, or "flame-like," Gothic, and you can see how the short, prickly spires are meant to make this building flicker in the eyes of the faithful. The church gives us a close-up look at gargoyles, the decorative drain spouts that also functioned to keep evil spirits away.

Inside you can see the final stage of Gothic, on the cusp of the Renaissance. It's also notable for carrying on the medieval tradition of stained-glass windows into more modern times, while keeping the dominant blues, greens, and reds popular in St. Séverin's heyday. Walk to the apse and admire the lone twisted Flamboyant Gothic column and the fan vaulting. The apse's windows (by Jean Bazaine, c. 1960) echo the fan-vaulting effect in a modern, abstract way. Each colorful window represents one of the seven sacraments—blue for baptism, yellow for marriage, etc. The impressive organ filling the entrance wall is a reminder that this church is still a popular venue for evening concerts (see gate for information posters, buy tickets at door).

• *At #22 Rue St. Séverin, you'll find the skinniest house in Paris, two windows wide. Rue St. Séverin leads right through...*

The Latin Quarter

Although it may look more like the Greek Quarter today (cheap gyros abound), this area is the Latin Quarter, named for the lan-

guage you'd have heard on these streets if you walked them in the Middle Ages. The University of Paris (founded 1215), one of the leading educational institutions of medieval Europe, was (and still is) nearby.

A thousand years ago, the "crude" or vernacular local languages were sophisticated enough to communicate basic human needs, but if you wanted to get philosophical, the language of choice was Latin. Medieval Europe's class of educated elite transcended nations and borders. From Sicily to Sweden, they spoke and corresponded in Latin. Now the most "Latin" thing about this area is the beat you may hear coming from some of the subterranean jazz clubs.

Walking along Rue St. Séverin, you can still see the shadow of the medieval sewer system. The street slopes into a central channel of bricks. In the days before plumbing and toilets, when people still went to the river or neighborhood wells for their water, flushing meant throwing it out the window. At certain times of day, maids on the fourth floor would holler, *"Garde de l'eau!"* ("Watch out for the water!") and heave it into the streets, where it would eventually wash down into the Seine.

As you wander, remember that before Napoleon III commissioned Baron Haussmann to modernize the city with grand boulevards (19th century), Paris was just like this—a medieval tangle. The ethnic feel of this area is nothing new—it's been a melting pot and university district for almost 800 years.

• *At the fork with Rue de la Harpe, bear slightly right to continue down Rue St. Séverin another block until you come to...*

⑩ Boulevard St. Michel

Busy Boulevard St. Michel (or "boul' Miche") is famous as the main artery for Paris' café and arts scene, culminating a block away (to the left) at the intersection with Boulevard St. Germain. Although nowadays you're more likely to find pantyhose at 30 percent off, there are still many cafés, boutiques, and bohemian haunts nearby.

The Sorbonne—the University of Paris' humanities department—is also nearby, if you want to make a detour, though visitors are not allowed to enter. (Turn left on Boulevard St. Michel and walk two blocks south. Gaze at the dome from the Place de la Sorbonne courtyard.) Originally founded as a theological school, the Sorbonne began attract-

ing more students and famous professors—such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Peter Abélard—as its prestige grew. By the time the school expanded to include other subjects, it had a reputation for bold new ideas. Nonconformity is a tradition here, and Paris remains a world center for new intellectual trends.

• *Also to the left is the Cluny Museum, which brings the era of Aquinas and Abélard to life (🕮 see the Cluny Museum Tour chapter). But to continue this walk, cross Boulevard St. Michel. Just ahead is...*

Place St. André-des-Arts

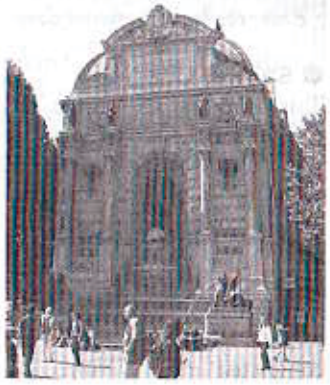
This tree-filled square is lined with cafés. In Paris, most serious thinking goes on in cafés. For centuries these have been social watering holes, where you can get a warm place to sit and stimulating conversation for the price of a cup of coffee. Every great French writer—from Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Derrida—had a favorite haunt.

Paris honors its intellectuals. If you visit the Panthéon (described on page 71)—several blocks up Boulevard St. Michel and to the left—you'll find French writers (Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Rousseau), inventors (Louis Braille), and scientists (including Marie and Pierre Curie) buried in a setting usually reserved for warriors and politicians.

• *Adjoining this square toward the river is the triangular Place St. Michel, with a Métro stop and a statue of St. Michael killing a devil. Note: If you were to continue west along Rue St. André-des-Arts, you'd find more Left Bank action (🕮 see the Left Bank Walk chapter).*

⓫ Place St. Michel

You're standing at the traditional core of the Left Bank's artsy, liberal, hippie, bohemian district of poets, philosophers, winos, and *baba cools* (neo-hippies). Nearby, you'll find international eateries, far-out bookshops, street singers, pale girls in black berets, jazz clubs, and—these days—tourists. Small cinemas show avant-garde films, almost always in the *version originale* (v.o.). For colorful wandering and café-sitting, afternoons and evenings are best. In the morning, it feels sleepy. The Latin Quarter stays up late and sleeps in.



In less commercial times,

Place St. Michel was a gathering point for the city's malcontents and misfits. In 1830, 1848, and again in 1871, the citizens took the streets from the government troops, set up barricades *Les Miz*-style, and fought against royalist oppression. During World War II, the locals rose up against their Nazi oppressors (read the plaques under the dragons at the foot of the St. Michel fountain).

In the spring of 1968, a time of social upheaval all over the world, young students battled riot batons and tear gas by digging up the cobblestones on the street and hurling them at police. They took over the square and declared it an independent state. Factory workers followed their call to arms and went on strike, challenging the de Gaulle government and forcing change. Eventually, the students were pacified, the university was reformed, and the Latin Quarter's original cobblestones were replaced with pavement, so future scholars could never again use the streets as weapons. Even today, whenever there's a student demonstration, it starts here.

• *From Place St. Michel, look across the river and find the prickly steeple of the Sainte-Chapelle church. Head toward it. Cross the river on Pont St. Michel and continue north along the Boulevard du Palais. On your left, you'll see the doorway to Sainte-Chapelle.*

SAINTE-CHAPELLE AND NEARBY

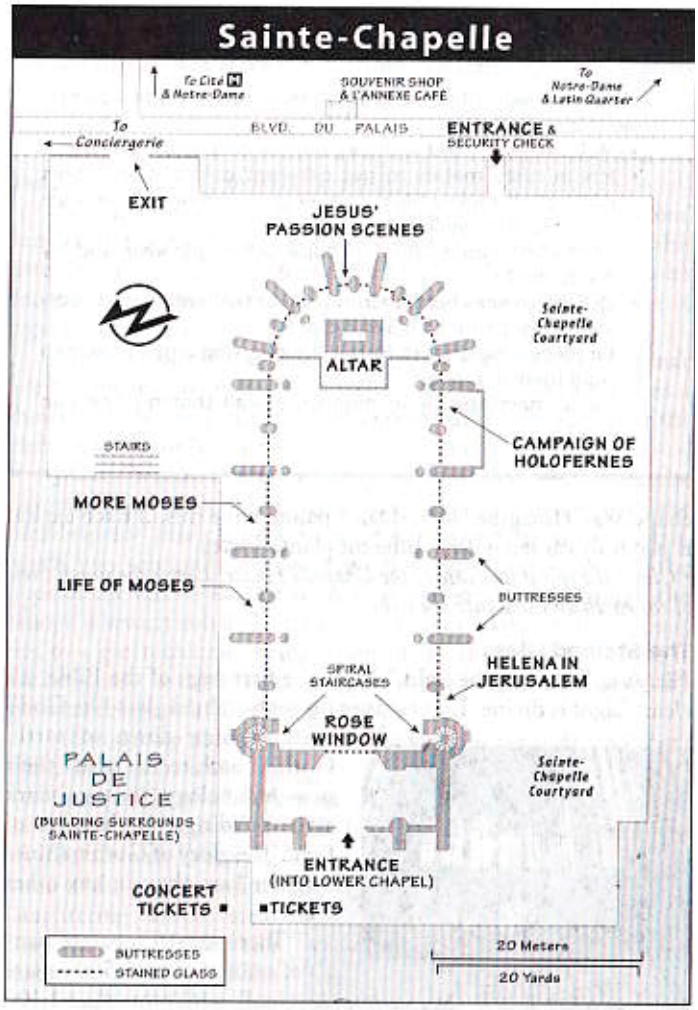
Security is strict at the Sainte-Chapelle complex because this is more than a tourist attraction: France's Supreme Court meets to the right of Sainte-Chapelle in the Palais de Justice. Expect a long wait (for tips on avoiding the worst lines, see "Avoiding Crowds" at the beginning of this chapter).

Once past security, you'll enter the courtyard outside Sainte-Chapelle, where you'll find information about upcoming church concerts. The ticket office is near the church entry, which is often hidden behind a long line of ticket buyers. Remember, if you already have a Museum Pass, advance ticket, or a Conciergerie combo-ticket, march up to the front, and you'll be allowed right in.

• *Enter the humble ground floor.*

⓫ Sainte-Chapelle

This triumph of Gothic church architecture is a cathedral of glass like no other. It was speedily built between 1242 and 1248 for King Louis IX—the only French king who is now a saint—to house the supposed Crown of Thorns (now kept at Notre-Dame and shown only on Good Friday and on the first Friday of the month at 15:00). Its architectural harmony is due to the fact that it was completed under the direction of one archi-



tect and in only six years—unheard of in Gothic times. Recall that Notre-Dame took more than 200 years.

Though the inside is beautiful, the exterior is basically functional. The muscular buttresses hold up the stone roof, so the walls are essentially there to display stained glass. The lacy spire is Neo-Gothic—added in the 19th century. Inside, the layout clearly shows an *ancien régime* approach to worship. The low-ceilinged basement was for staff and other common folks—worshipping under a sky filled with painted fleurs-de-lis, a symbol of the king. Royal Christians worshipped upstairs. The paint job, a 19th-century restoration, helps you imagine how grand this small, painted, jeweled

Stained Glass Supreme

Craftsmen made glass—which is, essentially, melted sand—using this recipe:

- Melt one part sand with two parts wood ash.
- Mix in rusty metals to get different colors—iron makes red; cobalt makes blue; copper, green; manganese, purple; cadmium, yellow.
- Blow glass into a cylinder shape, cut lengthwise, and lay flat to cool.
- Cut into pieces with an iron tool, or by heating and cooling a select spot to make it crack.
- Fit pieces together to form a figure, using strips of lead to hold them in place.
- Place masterpiece so high on a wall that no one can read it.

chapel was. (Imagine Notre-Dame painted like this...) Each capital is playfully carved with a different plant's leaves.

• *Climb the spiral staircase to the Chapelle Haute. Leave the rough stone of the earth and step into the light.*

The Stained Glass

Fiat lux. "Let there be light." From the first page of the Bible, it's clear: Light is divine. Light shines through stained glass like God's grace shining down to earth. Gothic architects used their new technology to turn dark stone buildings into lanterns of light. The glory of Gothic shines brighter here than in any other church.

There are 15 separate panels of stained glass (6,500 square feet—two thirds of it 13th-century original), with more than 1,100 different scenes, mostly from the Bible. These cover the entire Christian history of the world, from the Creation in Genesis (first window on the left, as you face the altar), to the coming of Christ (over the altar), to the end of the world (the round "rose"-shaped window at the rear of the church). Each individual scene is interesting, and the whole effect is overwhelming. Allow yourself a few minutes to bask in the glow of the colored light before tackling the individual window descriptions below.

• *Working clockwise from the entrance, look for these notable scenes, using the map in this chapter as a reference. Don't worry if you have trouble making sense of the windows—you're not alone. (The souvenir shop downstairs sells a little book with color photos for further tutoring.) The*

sun lights up different windows at various times of day. Overcast days give the most even light. On bright, sunny days, some sections are glorious, while others look like sheets of lead.

The first window on the left (with scenes from Genesis) is always dark because of a building butted up against it. Let's pass over that one and turn to the second window on the left.

Life of Moses (second window, dark bottom row of diamond panels): The first panel shows baby Moses in a basket, placed by his sister in the squiggly brown river. Next he's found by the pharaoh's daughter. Then he grows up. And finally, he's a man, a prince of Egypt on his royal throne.

More Moses (third window, in middle and upper sections): See how many guys with bright yellow horns you can spy. Moses is shown with horns as the result of a medieval mistranslation of the Hebrew word for "rays of light," or halo.

Jesus' Passion Scenes (directly over the altar and behind the canopy): These scenes from Jesus' arrest and Crucifixion were the backdrop for this chapel's *raison d'être*—the Crown of Thorns, which was originally displayed on this altar. Stand close to the steps of the altar—about five paces away—and gaze through the canopy where, if you look just above the altar table, you'll see Jesus, tied to a green column, being whipped. To the immediate right is the key scene in this relic chapel—Jesus (in purple robe) being fitted with the painful Crown of Thorns.

• *Continuing clockwise, find the window on the right wall that's four circular scenes wide.*

Campaign of Holofernes: On the bottom row, focus on the second circle from the left. It's a battle scene (the campaign of Holofernes) showing three soldiers with swords slaughtering three men. Examine the details. The background is blue. The men have different-colored clothes—red, blue, green, mauve, and white. You can actually see the folds in the robes, the hair, and facial features. Look at the victim in the center—his head is splotched with blood. Details like these were created either by scratching on the glass or by baking on paint. It was a painstaking process of finding just the right colors, fitting them together to make a scene... and then multiplying by 1,100.

Helena in Jerusalem (first window on the right wall, at the

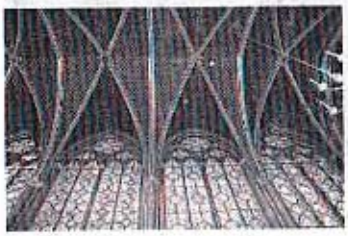
rear of the nave near where you'll exit): This window tells the story of how Christ's Crown of Thorns found its way from Jerusalem to Constantinople to this chapel. Start in the lower-left corner, where the Roman emperor Constantine (in blue, on his throne) waves goodbye to his Christian mom, Helena. She arrives at the gate of Jerusalem (next panel to the right). The other panels (though almost impossible for 21st-century eyes to follow) tell the rest of the story: Helena discovers the Crown of Thorns, and brings it back to Constantinople. Nine hundred years later, French Crusader knights invade the Holy Land and visit Constantinople. Finally, King Louis IX returns to France with the sacred relic, and builds this church to house it.

Rose Window (above entrance): This window (added 200 years later) is the chapel's climax, showing the final scene in human history. It's Judgment Day, with a tiny Christ in the center, presiding over a glorious moment of wonders and miracles.

Altar

The altar was raised up high to better display the Crown of Thorns, the relic around which this chapel was built. Notice the staircase: Access was limited to the priest and the king, who wore the keys to the shrine around his neck. Also note that there is no high-profile image of Jesus anywhere—this chapel was all about the Crown.

King Louis IX, convinced he'd found the real McCoy, spent roughly the equivalent of €500 million for the Crown, €370 million for the gem-studded shrine to display it in (later destroyed in the French Revolution), and a mere €150 million to build Sainte-Chapelle to house it. Today, the supposed Crown of Thorns is kept by the Notre-Dame Treasury (though it's occasionally brought out for display).



Lay your camera on the ground and shoot the ceiling. Those pure and simple ribs growing out of the slender columns are the essence of Gothic structure.

• *Exit Sainte-Chapelle. Back outside, as you walk around the church exterior, look down to see the foundation and take note of how much Paris has risen in the 750 years since Sainte-Chapelle was built. As you head toward the exit of the complex, you'll pass by the...*

Palais de Justice

Sainte-Chapelle sits within a huge complex of buildings that has housed the local government since ancient Roman times. It was the site of the original Gothic palace of the early kings of France. The only surviving medieval parts are Sainte-Chapelle and the Conciergerie prison.

Most of the site is now covered by the giant Palais de Justice, built in 1776, home of the French Supreme Court. The motto *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* over the doors is a reminder that this was also the headquarters of the Revolutionary government. Here they doled out justice, condemning many to imprisonment in the Conciergerie downstairs—or to the guillotine.

• Now pass through the big iron gate to the noisy Boulevard du Palais. Cross the street to the wide, pedestrian-only Rue de Lutèce and walk about halfway down.

Ⓑ Cité "Metropolitain" Métro Stop

Of the 141 original early-20th-century subway entrances, this is one of only a few survivors—now preserved as a national art treasure. (New York's Museum of Modern Art even exhibits one.) It marks Paris at its peak in 1900—on the cutting edge of Modernism, but with an eye for beauty. The curvy, plantlike ironwork is a textbook example of Art Nouveau, the style that rebelled against the erector-set squareness of the Industrial Age. Other similar Métro stations in Paris are Abbesses and Porte Dauphine.

The flower and plant market on Place Louis Lépine is a pleasant detour. On Sundays this square flutters with a busy bird market. And across the way is the Préfecture de Police, where Inspector Clouseau of *Pink Panther* fame used to work, and where the local Resistance fighters took the first building from the Nazis in August 1944, leading to the Allied liberation of Paris a week later.

• Pause here to admire the view. Sainte-Chapelle is a pearl in an ugly architectural oyster. Double back to the Palais de Justice, turn right onto Boulevard du Palais, and enter the Conciergerie (free with Museum Pass; pass holders can sidestep the ticket-buying line bottleneck).

⓫ Conciergerie

Though barren inside, this former prison echoes with history. The Conciergerie was the last stop for 2,780 victims of the guillotine, including France's last *ancien régime* queen, Marie-Antoinette. Before then, kings had used the building to torture and execute failed assassins. (One of its towers along the river was called "The Babbler," named for the pain-induced sounds that leaked from it.) When the Revolution (1789) toppled the king, the progressive Revolutionaries proudly unveiled a modern and more humane way to execute people—the guillotine. The Conciergerie was the epicenter of the Reign of Terror—the year-long period of the Revolution (1793-94) during which Revolutionary fervor spiraled out of control and thousands were killed. It was here at the Conciergerie that "enemies of the Revolution" were imprisoned, tried, sentenced, and marched off to Place de la Concorde for decapitation.

Inside the Conciergerie

Pick up a free map and breeze through the one-way, well-described circuit. You'll start in the spacious, low-ceilinged Hall of Men-at-Arms (Room 1), originally a guards' dining room warmed by four big fireplaces (look up the chimneys). During the Reign of Terror, this large hall served as a holding tank for the poorest prisoners. Then they were taken upstairs (in an area not open to visitors), where the Revolutionary tribunals grilled scared prisoners on their political correctness.

Continue to the raised area at the far end of the room (Room 4, today's bookstore). This was the walkway of the executioner, who was known affectionately as "Monsieur de Paris." Just past the bookstore, pause in rooms (to the right) with displays on Revolutionary history. Continuing on, you'll pass the cell (on the left) where shackled suspects were processed by the Office of the Keeper (or "Concierge"), who admitted prisoners, monitored torture...and recommended nearby restaurants. The next cell is where condemned prisoners combed their hair or touched up their lipstick before their final public appearance—waiting for the open-air cart (tumbrel) to pull up outside. The tumbrel would carry them to the guillotine, which was on Place de la Concorde.

Upstairs is a memorial room with the names of the 2,780 citizens condemned to death by the guillotine. While most of the famous names have been vandalized (Charlotte Corday, Robespierre, Louis XVI—who was called "Capet: last king of France"), you may see Marie-Antoinette (opposite the entry, 10 rows down, look for Capet Marie-Antoinette). Head down the hallway past more cells that give a sense of the poor and cramped conditions. Then comes

a small set of displays. You'll see old paintings of the Conciergerie and some of the famous prisoners.

Next, go downstairs, where—tucked behind heavy gray curtains—is a tiny chapel built on the site where Marie-Antoinette's prison cell originally stood. The chapel's three paintings tell her sad story: First, Marie (dressed in widow's black) stoically says goodbye to her grieving family as she's led off to prison. Next, still stoic, she awaits her fate. Finally, she piously kneels in her cell to receive the Last Sacrament on the night before her beheading. The chapel's walls drip with silver-embroidered tears. It was made in Marie's honor by Louis XVIII, the brother of beheaded Louis XVI and the first king to reclaim the throne after the Revolution.

The tour concludes outside in the "Cour de Femmes" courtyard, where female prisoners were allowed a little fresh air. Look up and notice the spikes still guarding from above...and be glad you can leave this place with your head intact. It wasn't so easy for enemies of the state. On October 16, 1793, Marie-Antoinette was awakened at 4:00 in the morning and led away. She walked the corridor, stepped onto the cart, and was slowly carried to Place de la Concorde, where she had her date with "Monsieur de Paris."

• *Back outside, turn left on Boulevard du Palais. On the corner is the city's oldest public clock. The mechanism of the present clock is from 1334, and even though the case is Baroque, it keeps on ticking.*

Turn left onto Quai de l'Horloge and walk along the river, past "The Babbler" tower. The bridge up ahead is the Pont Neuf, where we'll end this walk. At the first corner, veer left into a sleepy triangular square called...

⓯ Place Dauphine

It's amazing to find such coziness in the heart of Paris. This city of more than two million is still a city of neighborhoods, a collection of villages. The French Supreme Court building looms behind like a giant marble gavel. Enjoy the village-Paris feeling in the park (young Parisians flock to the square on weekend afternoons for *pétanque* and more). The **$$$ Caveau du Palais** restaurant is a refined spot for a drink (cool bar/café) or a fine meal, inside or out (daily, 17 Place Dauphine, tel. 01 43 26 04 28). If you feel more like plotting a revolution (while saving a few euros), try the funky **$$ Ma Salle à Manger** (daily, across the square at #26, tel. 01 43 29 52 34).

• Continue through Place Dauphine. As you pop out the other end, you're face-to-face with a...

Statue of Henry IV

Henry IV (1553-1610) is not as famous as his grandson, Louis XIV, but Henry helped make Paris what it is today—a European capital of elegant buildings and quiet squares. He built the Place Dauphine (behind you), the Pont Neuf (to the right), residences (to the left, down Rue Dauphine), the Louvre's long Grand Gallery (downriver on the right), and the tree-filled Square du Vert-Galant (directly behind the statue, on the tip of the island). The square is one of Paris' make-out spots; its name comes from Henry's nickname, the Green Knight, as Henry was a notorious ladies' man. The park is a great place to relax, dangling your legs over the concrete prow of this boat-shaped island.

• From the statue, turn right onto the old bridge. Pause at the little nook halfway across.

⓰ Pont Neuf and the Seine

This "new bridge" is now Paris' oldest. Built during Henry IV's reign (about 1600), its arches span the widest part of the river. Unlike other bridges, this one never had houses or buildings growing on it. The turrets were originally for vendors and street entertainers. In the days of Henry IV, who promised his peasants "a chicken in every pot every Sunday," this would have been a lively scene. From the bridge, look downstream (west) to see the next bridge, the pedestrian-only Pont des Arts. Ahead on the Right Bank is the long Louvre museum. Beyond that, on the Left Bank, is the Orsay. And what's that tall black tower in the distance?

Our walk ends where Paris began—on the **Seine River.** From Dijon to the English Channel, the Seine meanders 500 miles, cutting through the center of Paris. The river is shallow and slow within the city, but still dangerous enough to require steep stone embankments (built 1910) to prevent occasional floods.

In summer, the riverside *quais* are turned into beach zones with beach chairs and tanned locals, creating the Paris *Plages* (see page 51). The success of the Paris *Plages* helped motivate the city to take the next step: to permanently banish cars from long stretches of the riverside (such as between the Orsay and Pont de l'Alma), turning them into parks instead.

The Seine is still the main artery of Paris. Besides tourist boats, it also carries commercial barges with 20 percent of Paris' transported goods. And on the banks, sportsmen today cast into the waters once fished by Paris' original Celtic inhabitants 2,000 years ago.

• *We're done. You can take a boat tour that leaves from near the base of Pont Neuf on the island side (Vedettes du Pont Neuf; see page 34). Or you could take this book's walking tour of the Left Bank, which begins one bridge downriver (📖 see the Left Bank Walk chapter).*

The nearest Métro stop is Pont Neuf, across the bridge on the Right Bank. Bus #69 heads east along Quai du Louvre (at the north end of the bridge) and west along Rue de Rivoli (a block farther north; 📖 see the Bus #69 Sightseeing Tour chapter). Below the bridge, the riverside promenade leads west—filled with people, for good reason, on a sunny day. In fact, from here you can go anywhere—you're standing in the heart of Paris.