

# Paris, je t'aime



Travel writer CASS CHAPMAN was keen to discover if her beloved PARIS – the city she adored so much as a student – would still deliver for a family of four

As Audrey Hepburn famously announced in the movie *Sabrina*: “Paris is always a good idea.” And she wasn’t wrong. While I spent many a long weekend there in my early twenties, hanging out in smoky bars and one gallery after another, I recently returned with two tots in tow and it was no less magical.

Yes, it’s known as the city of love and I questioned how enjoyable it would be to navigate the busy streets with a buggy, but I loved visiting Paris with my children just as much as I did when I was a student. This is a city that keeps families firmly in mind; I only wish we’d been able to stay for longer.

I arrived with my husband, Jamie, and our two daughters, Lola, six, and Maya, who is 18 months, to be greeted by freezing temperatures. But hey, as the other famous saying goes: “If you can’t see Paris in the sun, then see it in the rain.” I’m not so sure about that one.

We headed straight for the Pavillon de la Reine, a stunning hotel tucked away behind a tiny gate that juts off the idyllic Place des Vosges in Le Marais, Paris’ achingly hip 3rd arrondissement. The pavement that fringes the square is covered in a stunning brick dome that houses gorgeous restaurants but, turn down towards the hotel, and



TOP: A trip to Paris isn't complete without seeing the Eiffel Tower  
LEFT: The idyllic Place des Vosges  
RIGHT: The hotel is in Le Marais







FAR LEFT: The Pavillon de la Reine can be found in Le Marais  
LEFT AND BELOW: The luxurious suites at the hotel



“There is no other artist like Picasso, whose work can capture the imagination of a six-year-old”

you're greeted by an ivy-covered building that twinkles with millions of white fairy lights.

We stayed in the utterly spoiling family suite, which has two bedrooms (key when travelling with a one-year-old, for obvious reasons), a living room and no less than three bathrooms. Maya's crib was ready when we arrived, and both children were greeted by teddies and Le Petit Prince bathroom products.

We were welcomed with an enticingly comfortable bed and Blason Louis red wine. While we didn't require a babysitter, the hotel can organise one at a moment's notice, using a local, trusted agency, which you may want to use just for a few hours while you head to the hotel's spa, if not a night out on the town.

Replete with a Turkish spa and Hammam, private treatment rooms and hot tubs, the spa can be found in the depths of the hotel away from the hubbub of the city that swirls above.

If you stay at the hotel in the spring or summer months, you can enjoy a picnic on the lawn of the Place des Vosges' inner square, all arranged by the hotel. There is literally nothing they won't do for families; we got back later than expected one evening with

a starving Maya and they whipped up a perfect omelette for her at lightning speed. Despite its elegance, the atmosphere of the hotel is in no way formal, making it a welcoming, unintimidating place to stay for those travelling to Paris with children.

Now, I'll admit we did succumb to a requisite day of Eurodisney, but in exchange I was determined to introduce some culture to the trip, so we upped and walked to the Musée Picasso Paris, a short five-minute stroll from the hotel. It doesn't have a permanent exhibition, instead the artwork on display changes every six months.

Set across four floors, it is filled with light and heaving with Picasso's signature, colour-fuelled surrealism that got Lola excited about painting in a way I'd never seen. She rushed to take pictures of the paintings to show her friends back at school (this is allowed as long as you don't use the flash, I hasten to add). There is arguably no other artist like Picasso, whose work can capture the imagination of a six-year-old, and I am delighted to say she showed far more interest in his work than the princess parade that she had viewed just 24 hours earlier.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: The girls were fascinated by Picasso's work BELOW: Le Marais is achingly hip BELOW RIGHT: The Musée de la Magie



Each floor is accessible by lift and the museum isn't overly large, making it ideal for little children. If you're a family that speaks French, there are family tours that can be booked ahead online but, in all honesty, we didn't partake (for linguistic reasons) and I





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don’t feel we had less of an experience as a result.

The Musée de la Magie (Museum of Magic) was recommended by our lovely concierge and it is a gem we would never have otherwise stumbled across. Just a short walk along Rue Saint Paul, it’s a quirky little place where children can play with antique puppets and enjoy magic shows. Lola was mesmerised and even Maya loved it, despite her young age. Think rabbits being pulled from hats, which Lola had never seen before, and the hallways are full of antique machines offering to read one’s fortune.

The Tuileries Garden, adjacent to the Louvre, and the Place de la Concorde was our next stop after a wander around the Louvre itself, and the girls hopped on a beautiful carousel, despite the freezing temperatures. In the summer months, the Jardin de Luxembourg is highly recommended for families, thanks to the sandpits, pony rides and seemingly endless ice-cream stands.

If you’re all galleried out, there is a wonderful area behind the Centre Pompidou called the Stravinsky fountains, which is full of sculptures based on the composer’s work. We loved the artwork and the girls enjoyed splashing in the water around the sculptures in their wellies.

The food scene of Paris is infamous and, even with young children, we didn’t miss out on some wonderful culinary experiences. While we may have avoided Michelin-star greats with the kids, we found some fabulous family-friendly joints.

One particularly memorable eatery was Camille, which envelopes the corner of the gorgeous Rue des Francs-Bourgeois



TOP: The Louvre is a must-visit ABOVE: Stunning details RIGHT: It houses many works of art BOTTOM LEFT: Enjoy the gardens



in Le Marais (it is a street that leaves you desperate to shop, as it is dotted with enticing boutiques). It is a wonderfully traditional bistro and we knew we were on to a winner as we were the only tourists dining amongst locals. The kids shared a beautiful entrecôte steak, and their father and I ate pot-au-feu, a French beef stew that warmed us from the inside out after a day in the freezing wind and rain.

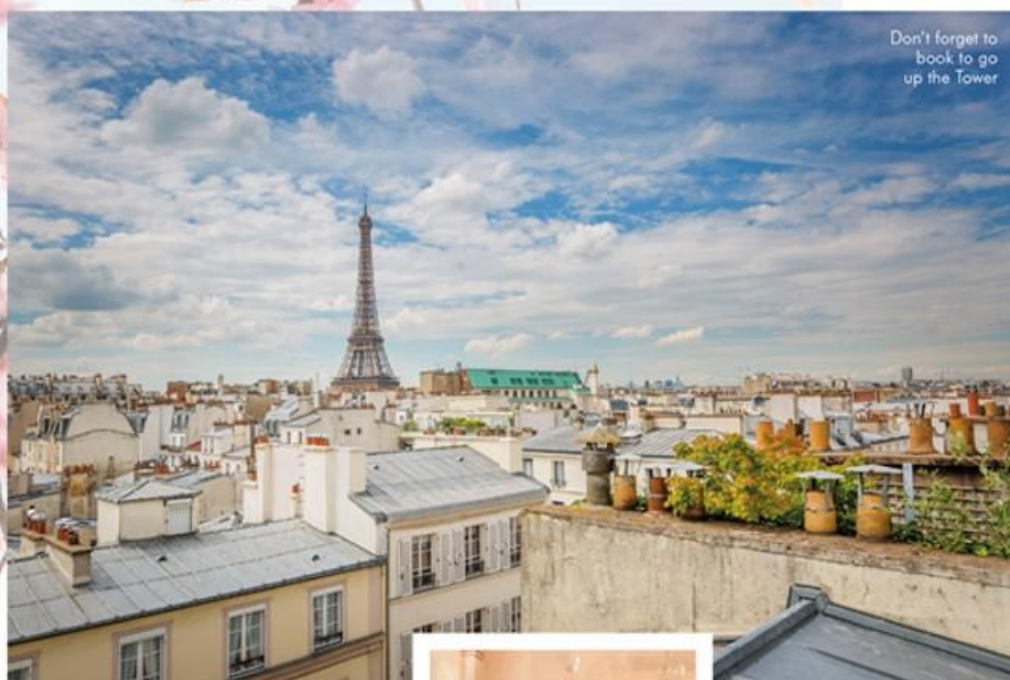
We did, of course, head to the Eiffel Tower so Lola could see it for the first time. Even through the fog and rain it was amazing, although we didn’t get further than a walk around it and a hot chocolate in a nearby café (book ahead if you want to go up to the top or even to the second floor; we learnt the hard way that you can’t book the same day you want to go up).

As we stood at the base of the great tower, the heavens opened and we hailed a taxi. One welcome change I noticed since my last visit to Paris nearly a decade ago is that most taxis take cards now so if, like me, you rarely carry cash it makes life much easier. We also dared to take the Metro and, though hectic



The kids will love the fountains at the Place de la Concorde





Don't forget to  
book to go  
up the Tower

## Little black book

### PAVILLON DE LA REINE

28 Place des Vosges  
(+33) 1 40 29 19 19

[pavillon-de-la-reine.com/en/](http://pavillon-de-la-reine.com/en/)

### MUSÉE PICASSO PARIS

5 Rue de Thoirgn  
(+33) 1 85 56 00 36,

[museepicassoparis.fr/en/](http://museepicassoparis.fr/en/)

### MUSÉE DE LA MAGIE

11 Rue Saint Paul  
(+33) 1 42 72 13 26,  
[museedelamagie.com](http://museedelamagie.com)

### TERMINUS NORD

23 Rue de Dunkerque.  
(+33) 1 42 85 05 15,  
[terminusnord.com/en/](http://terminusnord.com/en/)

### CAMILLE

24 Rue des Francs-Bourgeois  
(+33) 1 42 72 520 50

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thanks to it being rush hour, it was absolutely fine, even with the buggy. Lifts connect platforms across different floors but I couldn't have managed it without my husband alongside me and, as taxis are relatively reasonable, it's almost worth staying above ground.

Speaking of transportation, we returned to London on one of the new e320 Eurostar trains, which is arguably the only way to travel to and from the city. Despite my work as a travel writer, I hate flying, and the ease with which we got home, from city centre to city centre, made travelling with the children seamless. The food on board was fabulous, the train had a designated children's entertainment area and games, and the check-in at the Gare du Nord was a breeze.

While waiting to board we had a drink and light snack at Terminus Nord, which might look like a bit of a tourist relic but is actually an unexpected gem. The slightly shabby but charming Art Déco décor is worth a visit in itself, but they're wonderfully welcoming of children and it's a charming alternative to the station's Starbucks.

As we reclined comfortably on the train back home, the children were exhausted but ever so happy. Lola turned to me and asked when we were going to come back to Paris again. "Soon," was all I could tell her, smiling, although the opening of a new park next to the Louis Vuitton Foundation next year seems a perfect excuse to return. It'll simply add yet another child-friendly stamp to an already wonderfully welcoming city.



LEFT: The Picasso Museum was better than the princess parade! BELOW: Stop off at one of the many street cafes RIGHT: Enjoy a taste of France – fresh croissants



The Big Wheel of Paris at Place de la Concorde BELOW: The air swing at Tuileries Garden

