Paris: Discover 21 Free Activities and Attractions

Paris is a city brimming with cultural excitement and iconic landmarks. However, it's also known for being quite expensive. Surprisingly, there are numerous free activities in Paris that won't cost you a centime.

To help ease the burden on your budget, we've compiled a list of 21 highlights that are completely free.

We’re not just talking about the mundane. These are extraordinary activities and attractions that visitors would often pay to experience.

The Best Free Activities and Events in Paris

Free activities in Paris generally fall into two categories: exploring the streets to discover iconic landmarks and soaking up the sights and sounds of a city that rewards curious explorers, or participating in fun events and activities that are unexpectedly free. Here are some of the best free things to do in Paris:

1. Free Cinema

While the popcorn might cost you, Paris offers several venues with free film screenings. Many of these are open-air shows that attract both tourists and locals, sometimes with English subtitles.

One of the most popular spots for free screenings is Parc de la Villette, Paris's third-largest park, which hosts outdoor film screenings during the summer.

Other venues and pop-up screenings are scattered throughout the city, including during events like the annual La Chaise et l’Ecran (The Chair and the Screen). For current listings, check the Paris visitors bureau website.

2. Free Music Festivals

Many musicians dream of performing in Paris, but tickets for the biggest acts can be expensive. If you prefer to enjoy live music for free, there are several great options:

Fête de la Musique: This annual music festival features a mix of household names and diverse acts from around the globe. Villette Sonic: Held at La Villette, this two-day festival offers a mix of musical genres. Other venues occasionally host free performances. Check out Radio France’s Maison de la Radio, Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, Motus, and FNAC Live for free events.

3. Free Walking Tours

Exploring Paris on foot is one of the best ways to experience the city without spending any money.

For those who prefer a more guided experience, free walking tours are available. Although places may be limited and tips are encouraged, Discover Walks offers reservations for free guided tours.

4. Nuit Blanche

Nuit Blanche is an annual arts event that has grown in popularity since its inception in 2002. Unlike many free things to do in Paris, which are clustered around the warm summer months, this city-wide arts festival takes place in October.

This year's program features over 100 events at various museums and venues, all offering free entry for a unique night of cultural immersion.

5. Bastille Day Military Parade

Défilé Militaire du 14 Juillet, the 14th July military parade, is the most spectacular event in France, commemorating Bastille Day.

The national day is celebrated with a grand military parade and flyover, attended by dignitaries and thousands of spectators. For a prime view of this free event, head to the Champs-Elysées on July 14th.

6. Paris Carnival

The annual Carnaval de Paris is a lively and exciting event in the Parisian social calendar. Although it may not be the biggest or most famous carnival in France, it is undoubtedly one of the most vibrant and exciting free events in Paris.

The carnival was paused during COVID-19 restrictions but has since returned. Learn more about the upcoming carnival from the volunteers who organize it.

Free Museums and Galleries in Paris

While Paris is home to the world's largest museum, the Louvre, and many world-class galleries, most charge an entry fee. However, a well-timed visit can unlock some of the most prestigious museums for free.

7. Free Sundays

On the first Sunday of every month, many of Paris's renowned exhibits open their doors for free. This includes major attractions like the Louvre, Musée d’Orsay, and Centre Pompidou. Plan your visit accordingly to see some of the world's greatest masterpieces without spending a euro.

Note: EEC citizens under 25 can usually enter for free any day of the week.

8. Mémorial De La Shoah

The Mémorial De La Shoah is one of the newer museums in Paris, offering free entry to all visitors. The permanent exhibition is interactive and informative, helping visitors understand the tragic history of France’s Jewish community during World War II.

9. Musée Carnavalet

The Musée Carnavalet delves into the history of Paris itself, with exhibits spread across two elegant mansions. The extensive collection includes art, historical artifacts, and educational displays tracing the city's past back to prehistoric times.

10. Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Fans of modern art will appreciate the free entry to the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The museum showcases lesser-known artists alongside works by masters like Picasso, featuring a collection of over 15,000 pieces.

11. Musée de la Préfecture de Police

If you're looking for unconventional free attractions, the Musée de la Préfecture de Police is a fascinating option. Housed in a functioning police station, this museum explores the history of law enforcement in Paris and is known for displaying the last operational guillotine in France.

12. Sacré-Coeur Basilica

While the magnificent Notre Dame Cathedral remains closed for renovations after the 2019 fire, the Sacré-Coeur Basilica serves as a stunning alternative. Known for its impressive dome and striking mosaics, the basilica offers breathtaking views of Paris.

Great Walks in Paris

Exploring Paris on foot can be an enlightening experience. As Thomas Jefferson once said, “A walk about Paris will provide lessons in history, beauty, and the point of life.”

13. The Famous Cemeteries of Paris

The garden cemeteries of Paris have been attracting visitors for generations. The Père Lachaise Cemetery is the most visited necropolis in the world, with ornate tombs and the final resting places of notable figures like Oscar Wilde, Edith Piaf, Jim Morrison, and Frédéric Chopin.

The Cimetière du Montparnasse houses the graves of artistic and intellectual luminaries, including

Charles Baudelaire, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Serge Gainsbourg.

14. La Promenade Plantée

Known as La Coulée Verte (The Green Belt), this 4.5 km plant-lined pathway winds through the 12th arrondissement. With its elevated sections, it provides a peaceful escape from the city's hustle and bustle.

15. Jardin des Tuileries

The Jardin des Tuileries offers a scenic walk between the Louvre and the Place de la Concorde. This area, once a site of historical significance, is now filled with Instagram-worthy spots.

Alternative Sights and Experiences

16. Drinking Water Fountains

As you explore Paris, don't forget to bring a refillable water bottle. Potable water fountains are scattered throughout the city, including some that dispense eau pétillante (sparkling water). Find them all on this handy map of free water fountains in Paris.

17. Famous Film and TV Locations

Paris has been the backdrop for many iconic movies. Exploring film locations, such as scenes from Amélie, The Da Vinci Code, and The Bourne Identity, is a unique way to experience the city. Film Locations provides a comprehensive list of sites to visit.

18. Picnic in the Parks

Nothing beats a picnic in one of Paris's beautiful parks. The city boasts around 480 parks, including the sprawling Bois de Boulogne and the Jardin du Luxembourg. Enjoy a leisurely lunch surrounded by nature and history.

19. Explore Île de la Cité on Foot

This historic island in the Seine is home to several of Paris’s most impressive sights, including Notre Dame, Sainte-Chapelle, the Hôtel-Dieu, and the Pont Neuf. A walk here is essential for any visitor to Paris.

20. Markets of Paris

The markets of Paris are a feast for the senses. Marché Bastille is popular for its variety, while Marché aux Puces de Saint-Ouen is a must-visit for antique lovers. For a bit of everything, check out the Marché d'Aligre.

21. Shoes and Views in Paris

Window shopping in Paris can be a rewarding experience. Galeries Lafayette Paris Haussmann offers panoramic views from its rooftop terrace, while the nearby Printemps shopping center provides a 360-degree view of the city.

We could keep adding to this list, but hopefully, these suggestions provide plenty of inspiration for enjoying Paris without spending a euro. Bon voyage!

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