

Only in Paris: All reviews

www.eurocheapo.com (Nicky Gardner & Susanne Kries):

Only in Paris: A new guide to the French capital.

Is it even possible to write a fresh word on Paris? “La ville lumière” is Europe’s most celebrated destination for tourists and it has attracted a galaxy of fine travel writers. The dust had hardly settled after the Napoleonic Wars before a flood of English-language guidebook writers descended on the city. Edward Planta’s 1814 guide set the standard for some generations. It also set a record for the longest guidebook title. It ran to 30 words, concluding with the magnificent “...accurately describing remarkable edifices, places of amusement and every other object worthy of attention.” In the 200 years since Planta’s smart debut, a dozen guidebooks a year have come out on Paris and most sweep through the city without bringing much that is new to the endeavor.

But this spring, a very special new guide to Paris is on the market. Duncan JD Smith’s new book on the French capital has echoes of Planta in the full title: “Only in Paris – A Guide to Locations, Hidden Corners and Unusual Objects.”

But while Planta is encyclopedic, Duncan JD Smith is highly selective and the appeal of this book is in the sheer ingenuity of the author who is an accomplished urban explorer. For Smith, Paris is a blank canvas, a place waiting to be discovered. One has a sense of a man who has conducted impeccable research but still contrives to arrive in Paris with an open mind. That’s a rare touch.

Discovering “Only in Paris” has been a real delight, and something of a surprise too. We had Smith marked down a natural citizen of “Mitteleuropa.” We ran across his guides to Vienna, Prague and Budapest and have over the years followed with interest as the “Only In” series extended to German cities and last year to Zürich. With “Only in Paris,” Smith demonstrates very convincingly that he is equally at home in the Latin world. Where next, we wonder?

In “Only in Paris,” Smith tracks down 98 curiosities that have helped shape the texture of Paris both past and present. Each sight is the touchstone for a story. This is a delightful way to be led around a city. Smith escorts us through Capuchin quarries, up the “buttes” in the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont and to the remains of the Bastille. The book is especially strong on “Paris mondial” and nicely captures the many faces of Paris with its migrants from Africa, Indo-China, Russia and beyond. But the itinerary is not limited to the obscure and offbeat. Familiar Paris gets good coverage too, though invariably with a very novel perspective. Yes, there is something new to be said about the Eiffel Tower and the hunchback of Notre Dame and Smith rises to the challenge with authority and good humor.

“Only in Paris” is a great read and a handsome tribute to one of Europe’s loveliest cities. The book is published by The Urban Explorer. It is a volume that oozes high production values, with decent quality paper that is perfect for showcasing Smith’s photography.

Janine Marsh (www.thegoodlifrance.com):

If you love Paris and fascinating facts about the world’s most popular city – you’ll love this book... It’s not like your average guide book with details you can find anywhere on line for free – this book is written by someone who has walked its streets for many, many hours. Duncan JD Smith is a Paris expert and in this book he has

concentrated on the off the beaten track side of the city. The quirky, the strange, the surprising and the downright odd are all here and it makes for utterly riveting reading.

www.amazon.co.uk:

Beyond the tourist hotspots.

Wonderfully well-written and beautifully photographed, an intriguing and inspiring fresh look at Paris beyond the typical tourist hotspots, history and anecdote draw you into a deeper understanding of Paris through the centuries, assisted serendipity! Yet another gem from the 'Only In' series by Duncan Smith.

Michiel Leijnse (www.minorsights.com):

At Minor Sightings we're all about discovering the not-so obvious attractions that are overlooked by tourist hordes and guidebooks alike. We recently came across a brilliant guidebook to Paris that takes the exact same approach. Minor Sightings readers will be familiar with suggestions like the Cité des Fleurs and the Musée des Arts Forains, but there are plenty of other options, including obscure religious communities (discreet Armenians, Ganesh-worshipping Hindus, and onion-domed Russian Orthodox churches), lots of bones (including those of Louis XVI and empress-cum-saint Helena) and the Original Crown of Thorns (yup, that one!). Whilst in the Louvre, Smith takes you to see that other Da Vinci painting (the one everybody ignores on their way to Mona L). He proffers you the Chateau de Vincennes instead of de Versailles, and he pulls out enough churches to make even the most avid church lover forget about Notre Dame. The sightings are grouped, as they should be, by arrondissement, making it relatively easy to string a bunch of them together for casual strolling and exploring.

Mike Gerard, travel writer (www.beyond-london-travel.com):

It is a delight to come across a book like "Only in Paris", which is far more than just another guidebook to the city. It's a delightfully mixed bag of topics, the only common factor being that the author finds them interesting and we're sure the reader will too. The author divides Paris into five different areas, with almost half the entries in the Left Bank and Right Bank areas, the rest split between the suburbs. Every piece is an enjoyable read, and the range should appeal to anyone who likes really discovering a city rather than only doing the obvious. Chapters include the Bones of Louis XIV, Monsieur Hulot and Modernism, Hagia Sophia in Miniature, A Visit to a Hindu Temple, and A School for Beekeepers. It's one of the most enjoyable books about Paris we've seen in a long time, and highly recommended.

Terri Fogarty (www.europeupclose.com):

I have been to Paris more than 25 times and thought I was pretty familiar with most locations and aspects of this fabulous city. But Duncan J.D. Smith showed me a thing or two! Not only does he point out some unique spots, he provides a bit of history to let the reader now why this spot is worth a visit. From obscure museums to favorite bistros, Smith covers Paris with fascinating tales and insights.

Svetlana Darche (a reader):

Sometimes it takes a stranger to point out the beauty and wonder hidden before our very eyes. Thank you for this important work and for providing such a great treasure map for my next trip to Paris!

www.france-travel-guide.net:

If you love Paris, and idiosyncrasy, and off-the-beaten-track, and weird and wonderful, and “I never knew that” and “Did I really see what I thought I saw?” then you mustn’t go to Paris without this book.

This compendium of nooks and crannies gives you far more than you could ever hope to gain from a conventional travel guide; it does what it says on the tin, and then some. Moreover, Duncan Smith is just the person to lead you by the hand, metaphorically at least, into a world where you can enjoy mint tea beneath a minaret, search for the bones of Louis XVI, or check out the curse of the Chateau de Vincennes.

Discover wonders of the East, a counterfeit museum, concealed courtyards and secret squares, and even Monet's *Soleil Levant*. A Paris, in fact, of ancient ruins, eccentric museums, hidden communities, and underground worlds. More than enough to organise your own expedition through the City of Light in 98 easy chapters.

French Entrée (Issue 102, Jan-Feb 2014):

Magnifique!

Certain Parisian sites are familiar to many, but Duncan has done well to include an awful lot that aren’t and the colour photography that accompanies each of the 98 listings make it all the more absorbing – pictures of the Musée de la Poste’s padlocked enveloped and the old timber-framed buildings in the city’s 3rd arrondissement. Sometimes you need to see it to believe it – like the table made from human body parts in the Musée de l’Histoire de la Médecine. Another really useful device is the author’s use of footnotes, listing other places of interest nearby. There’s a handy guide to opening times as well, ensuring “Only in Paris” is simple to use and perfect for those on a short séjour.

www.secretsofparis.com (Rachel Veroff):

Another peek into the secrets of Paris.

If you are looking for a light, well-written and comprehensive guidebook to Paris, I recommend Duncan J.D. Smith’s “Only in Paris: A guide to unique locations, hidden corners and unusual objects”.

This guidebook is both up-to-date and highly informative. It addresses a wide variety of interests, from history, religion, and architecture to shopping, restaurants, and popular culture. Even an experienced Francophile might discover something new by flipping through these colourful pages.

The chapters are organized by neighbourhood, a helpful way to organize what might otherwise seem like an overwhelming amount of information. This is because every neighbourhood in Paris has a distinct personality, with its own stories to tell, unique communities of people and many hidden corners.

If you follow Smith's guide from beginning to end, you will start in the monumental and museum-rich centre of the city. Then you will spiral outwards through impressive gardens, through the bourgeois shopping district, through the university areas and the famous Left Bank, with its jazz cafés, past old churches and up dark stairwells, all the way to Montmartre, known for its nightlife and cabarets.

Smith provides enough historical context to be interesting, but never so much to be boring. The photographs are beautiful, and the layout is quite easy to navigate. If you are looking for a good guidebook for your trip to Paris, I recommend this one.

The Sheffield Star, Colin Drury (05.13):

Forget Notre-Dame and look at the rats!

It's not exactly your typical piece of travel advice: when in Paris check out the pest control shop near the old market. But then Duncan J D Smith – the Ecclesall author of eight European guide books which have sold 160,000 copies – isn't exactly your typical travel writer. Rather, he proclaims himself an urban explorer, dresses like Indiana Jones and reckons, sure, if you're going to the French capital, check out the Eiffel Tower – but don't miss platform five of the Bastille Metro station. Why? We'll get to that shortly.

For now, this piece of advice – along with that pest control pearl – is among the wisdom offered in his ninth tourist book, "Only In Paris". It follows previous tomes on such places as Zurich, Budapest and Vienna, all of which offered the same mix of unusual advice (visitors to Cologne were told to go into the sewers) and fancy-that facts.

The 52-year-old says: "The whole point of this series is to break new ground in revealing city histories by highlighting less well-known locations. Those are the most interesting bits, aren't they?"

So, that pest control shop? Recommended because it once served the now demolished Les Halles wholesale market, described as the "stomach of Paris" and home to more rats than you could shake a whisker at. "So this shop bears testimony to what was once a key location in Parisian life," explains Duncan. "The visitor should at least glance in the window." That tube station, meanwhile, has remains of the famous Bastille prison within its walls.

The book doesn't completely eschew the normal tourist trail either. Notre-Dame and the Arc de Triomphe both get a mention, as does the Eiffel Tower. "Did you know," wonders Duncan, "it's painted three shades of the same colour to make it appear uniform from a distance?" You do now.

If writing nine travel books is an achievement, though, so too is Duncan's own journey to writing them. The one-time book-seller came up with the idea for an alternative travel guide to Vienna after moving there from Sheffield to be with his Austrian partner in 2003. Publishers Christian Brandstatter Verlag loved the format and have asked him to keep writing ever since.

Next year, he's already scheduled him to do London. And he can't wait. "It's the 10th book in the series," he says. "So it had to be London."

Pat & Reuben Leberman, New Zealand:

Very impressed with "Only in Paris". It is delightful. It would appear that you have the most wonderful career, travelling, writing, and excellent photography - what more could one want?!