



Paris

# Beyond the Bistro

Paris has set the cuisine standard for years. But other food capitals have now caught up and are redefining food standards. How has that changed Paris' culinary scene? Join us for dinner in the French capital.

Text *Rooksana Hossenally*  
Photography *Nicole Franzen*



**Previous page:** Riorecte volest venihil icatur autem qui net, eatus, quae con nempos alicien  
**Left page:** Riorecte volest venihil icatur autem qui net, eatus, et, occabo. Et occusandis magnam quae con nempos alicien

## Paris

A couple of decades ago, young, ambitious chefs-to-be flocked to Paris, hoping to be taken under the wings of the master chefs of one of the many haute-cuisine restaurants over there. Now, other capital cities, such as London, Lima and Copenhagen, are attracting foodies from all over the world, including French ones. A new generation of restaurateurs and chefs has slowly been changing the old Paris bistro culture, adding international elements, and resulting in an exciting, delicious mix of something old and something new.

### Historical foodies

Even though other food capitals have been taking over Paris' culinary leading role, the passion for food has never left the City of Love, though. Food has always been a central part of life for the locals for whom eating out several times a week is the norm. Parisians' gastronomic roots date back all the way to the Middle Ages, explains Alec Lobano, an American author and food journalist who has lived in Paris for the last 30 years. "The rise to gastronomy in Paris was due to its location as the French king's court, which numbered several thousand people and required an endless array of sumptuous meals and banquets. This was combined with the fact that France has always had such extraordinary produce as one of the world's most agriculturally bountiful and fertile countries," Lobrano explains. "After the French Revolution, chefs formerly employed by the nobility went out on their own after finding themselves without work when the aristocrats were chased away. The restaurant was born, and this led to the growth of diverse and knowledgeable food-loving public."

As a result, the Parisians have developed a taste for the refined over the centuries, value

quality and locally-sourced produce. The fact that the city's restaurants remained fully booked throughout the last financial crisis says much about Parisians' connection with dining out. It is an experience that's as much about eating as it is about coming together to share food and wine with friends.

In Paris, a classic meal would often mean steak and *frites*, or *confit de canard* with creamy *gratin dauphinois* at a low-key neighbourhood bistro or brasserie. Or how about French classics such as frogs' legs and Charolais beef tartare with full-bodied wine classics from the Bordeaux or Bourgogne? But, today, just like in those other upcoming food capitals (see page xxxx), a wave of young chefs has turned the city's dining scene on its head in recent years, pushing the boundaries of traditional French cuisine to integrate foreign ingredients. The result is uninhibited French food served in a more relaxed setting. The focus has shifted to pleasing people with good food, as opposed to racing towards technical perfection and Michelin stars. And that's noticeable throughout the day.

### Multicultural breakfast

Let's start with breakfast. For many Parisians, that used to mean quickly absorbing a shot of espresso and a flaky, buttery croissant at a neighbourhood café. But today, and especially on weekends, breakfast has become more of a brunch ritual. Parisians take the time to sit down at one of the recently opened cafés offering freshly roasted specialty coffee and home-baked cakes, like Ten Belles or Loustic. At places like these, the weekend brunch trend has also really come into its own.

As a result, almost every restaurant and bistro offers a brunch menu, and a multitude of restaurants specialising in providing empty stomachs with extended breakfast have emerged. Holybelly is one such local favourite, whose timber high stools are usually taken not long after the café opens its doors. Close to the lively Canal Saint Martin in the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, it's light and bright, with a laid-back café atmosphere that's perfect for chasing away the Sunday blues. Staff here juggle between fluent English and French, blurring the lines between borders – still a rare sight in the city today.

People come for the cosmopolitan atmosphere >

as much as they do for the soft poached eggs with slow-roasted tomatoes and mushrooms sautéed in thyme and garlic. Who ever would have thought Parisians would trade in their short and sweet breakfast for something more substantial and savoury? “Brunch really responds to a demand,” says Wai-Ming Lung, founding editor of French online food and lifestyle magazine orgyness.com. “People work more during the week and sleep in during the weekends. And when they wake up, they want to eat and share that experience with friends and family.” Oliver Bon – one of the founders of the Experimental Group, which has transformed Paris’ drinking culture with its speakeasy cocktail bars – agrees. “Sunday lunch has always had a significant place in French culture. Brunch – despite its Anglicism, which is not very sexy to us – is a way of keeping up with that family tradition, but in a more relaxed manner.”

Such is the appeal of an extended brunch menu, comparable to that served in, for instance, cafés in laid-back Australian beachside town Byron Bay. Everything is made fresh with local ingredients, and is served with a range of specialty drinks. There’s a mean *chai masala*, cold-pressed juices and a standout flat white made with coffee beans from neighbouring roasters Belleville Brûlerie. With a menu like this and a blissful, relaxed vibe, it’s not hard to spend a good part of the weekend soaking it all up.

**An American in Paris**

Paris was always reluctant to embrace the fast-food culture, but with the hamburger now a restaurant staple, it has even entered the French capital’s households. Paris has succeeded in truly making American-style food its own by blending classic comfort food with high quality, seasonal produce. A host of top-ranking burger bars like Paris New York, Le Camion Qui Fume, Blend Hamburger and Big Fernand have become a well-loved part of the local foodie scene. But here, the burgers are gourmand, and eating them is a sit-down affair, definitely not to be rushed. Burgers aside, other single-concept restaurants are on the rise: like Boulettes in the Marais, which serves up a delectable (albeit healthier) version of the all-American meatball. “The burgers went mainstream with genera- >

**Places to stay**

**Hotel Paradis**  
In the up-and-coming Strasbourg Saint Denis area of the city, this is the perfect base for sampling the neighbourhood’s eateries like Paris New York reference burger joint and Le 52, a neo-bistro style sure bet with refined food, great wines, and stellar service.  
**hotelparadisparis.com**  
41 Rue des Petites Écuries

**Grand Pigalle Hotel**  
With its speakeasy bar feel in the rooms, this hotel is located right in South Pigalle, the most popular bar district of Paris, dotted with great places to eat.  
**grandpigalle.com**  
29 Rue Victor Masse

**Grand Hotel du Palais Royal**  
An award-winning five-star hotel with penthouse suites that boast views of the Paris skyline. Located right in the centre of the city, it’s within walking distance to the Louvre, the River Seine and the opera house.  
**grandhoteldupalaisroyal.com**  
4 Rue de Valois

**9Hotel Paris**  
New, boutique-style hotel chain with outposts in Montparnasse, République and Opera. All locations feature modern design and art, an attractive living room like lobby and the prices are very reasonable for Paris standards.  
**9-hotel-collection.com**

**Places to visit**

**Gaîté Lyrique**  
An old theatre that’s been turned into a venue for art exhibitions, film and documentary screenings and various other events all year-around.  
**gaité-lyrique.net**  
3bis Rue Papin

**Rodin Museum & Picasso Museum**  
Both housed inside atmospheric mansions, these museums are the ideal locations to experience the works and lives of sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and painter/sculptor Pablo Picasso (1881-1973).  
**Rodin Museum: musee-rodin.fr, 79 Rue de Varenne**  
**Picasso Museum: museeepicaso-paris.fr, 5 Rue de Thorigny**

**Marais neighbourhood**  
This area’s tiny winding streets are lined with a wide range of shops from the chains like Maje and Sandro to one-off creator boutiques that are also often open on Sundays (most shops and restaurants are closed then). Drop into Merci, a giant concept store of all things cool and beautiful, and make sure to have a seat at the quaint adjoining café lined by **second-hand books**.

**Montmartre**  
Hilltop village Montmartre’s winding cobbled streets and its magnificent houses, as well as vineyard, make you forget the outside world exists. Best seen on foot, so spare some time for a nice, long stroll. Don’t miss the country lane Villa Léandre – with its colourful houses – and the secret mansion-house Hotel Particulier, which comes with a bar and garden.

**Right (clockwise from top left):**  
XXXXXXXXXX,  
Paris New York (rechtsbovenin),  
XXXXXXXXXX, XXXXX  
XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX



David Foessel (Paris New York)

# Mus sim volo riam conserunt offica oribu sae magni hillu nam berum aut



tions X and Y [born between the mid-1960s and 1980, and the 1980s and 2000, respectively], based on their nostalgia for the burgers they ate at McDonald's," food editor Lung says. "When those generations were adults, they had more money to spend and were more food conscious, giving rise to the gourmet, quality burger, which is no longer synonymous with fast food."

### Rise of the neo-bistro

Gourmet burger bars make great lunch stops, but many Parisians still insist on a longer sit-down with a glass of wine during their one-hour (or even two-hour) lunch break. For more of a gastro experience that's more closely tethered to Anglo-style cuisine, there's nothing like stepping into chef Grégory Marchand's welcoming restaurant Frenchie. A small and cosy tudor-style bistro tucked away on a cobble side street of the second arrondissement, it forms a trio with the irresistible Frenchie To Go next door, and Frenchie Wine Bar across the street.

A young chef who trained across the world, Marchand has a penchant for English countryside specialities, like slow roasted meats. As soon as one walks through the door, homely aromas waft their way through the din of diners eager to tuck into the seasonal menu, all made with top-of-the-range local produce. A starter might be creamy artichoke, tangy cheddar and black truffle, followed by suckling pig with glazed carrots and mustard seeds, finished with a selection of heavenly British cheese from Neal's Yard or a heavenly Brillat-Savarin *mille-feuille*. Washed down with a sterling local wine, there's no experience that merges foreign techniques with classic French cuisine while maintaining the refinement of tradition like one at Frenchie.

With his cross-border cuisine, Marchand fuels a move *bistronomy*, which involves

serving gourmet modern-bistro fare in an informal setting. The movement really took hold of the city ten years ago with the arrival of Le Chateaubriand, a new type of bistro: a 'neo-bistro'. It was opened by Iñaki Aizpitarte, an unsuspecting Basque landscape gardener who started cooking at 27 years old – which is later than most chefs. He started pitching in at restaurant kitchens to earn a living while travelling the world, turning into a passion that resulted in a restaurant of his own.

The move gave rise to an entire generation (coined 'the Iñaki generation') of well-travelled young chefs, many of whom were also self-taught, to brave the formal Parisian food scene and open their own establishments to offer high-ranking French fare that deviates just enough from the local culinary traditions laid down by the godfathers of French gastronomy like Auguste Escoffier and Paul Bocuse. Culinary entrepreneur Bon is also a follower of bistronomy. "It set the scene for the revival of French cuisine: simple, dedicated to taste and accessible. Traditional French restaurants have had to adapt to their new rivals all the way to their very core, including the coffee, bread, meat et cetera." Bon and his colleagues serve drinks, snacks, bites and dishes at their bars and restaurants that are true to the bistronomy movement. "The future holds a place only for the restaurateurs who have a real passion for this profession, who are truly dedicated to food and products, who know their produce and where it's from." Lung believes bistronomy paved the way for the organic scene in Paris. "Before the bistronomy movement, organic produce would come from Spain and Germany," he says. "There was nothing here; it had to be created from scratch by passionate people. This also applies to the wine industry – organic wines are now really popular, despite having already existed since the 1980s."

### Low-fuss cuisine

Since a decade, Le Chateaubriand has been one of the most popular restaurants in the city. Here, gourmet cuisine or *cuisine d'auteur*, as the chef calls it, is served inside the plain but soulful interiors of a neighbourhood bistro. "I was always fascinated by the local bistro or brasserie – they are meeting places for the

Jean-Louis Blondeau (Candelaria)

Left (clockwise from top left): XXXXXXXXXXXX, Xxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
Restaurant Candelaria

## Paris



Jasmin Evans/Art Associates

**Right page:** Frenchie Restaurant, Chef Gregory Marchand rechts

- 1 Restaurant Holybelly
- 2 Restaurant Frenchie
- 3 Restaurant Chateaubriand
- 4 Hotel du Nord
- 5 Restaurant Candelaria
- 6 Concept store Merci
- 7 Theatre La Gaîté Lyrique
- 8 Villa Léandre
- 9 Musée Picasso
- 10 Hotel Paradis
- 11 Hotel Particulier

### Places to eat/drink

**Holybelly**  
One of the best places to experience Paris' new brunch culture.  
[holysel.ly](http://holysel.ly)  
9 Rue Lucien Sampaix

**Frenchie**  
Anglo-French cuisine to the max. Booking mandatory.  
[frenchie-restaurant.com](http://frenchie-restaurant.com)  
5 Rue du Nil

**Le Chateaubriand**  
The restaurant that paved the way for the bistronomy movement, so not to be missed during your Paris trip. Booking mandatory.  
[lechateaubriand.net](http://lechateaubriand.net)  
129 Avenue Parmentier

**Candelaria**  
Cocktail bars are also a new trend in Paris, and this is one of the most popular ones, hidden at the back of a taqueria and accessible through a nondescript door.  
[quixotic-projects.com/venue/candelaria](http://quixotic-projects.com/venue/candelaria)  
52 Rue de Saintonge

locals, I just love it," says Aizpitarte. "I decided to open my own bistro, but to cook things I love to eat from all over the world, from the places I'd been on my travels". The chef and his team serve a several-course meal of low-fuss yet inventive French cuisine heavy in international soul. Think: mouth-watering beef cheek with zingy mango sauce, and full-flavoured lamb tagine with pickled vegetables. Always pushing the boundaries of flavour combinations, the menu changes according to available produce and seasonality, so diners never know what they're going to get. Not only does the unexpected menu take away the formal edge normally associated with dining out, it also encourages diners to arrive with an open mind.

Changing the way Parisians experience food, the city – which has over 40,000 restaurants – is now scattered with neo-bistros that come with month-long waiting lists. This new love for foreign ingredients has also opened the door to a rise of sleek foreign restaurants. There's refined Italian (at Ober Mamma and Daroco) and inventive Japanese (at Neige d'Ete, Pages and Cartel), and many more fusion restaurants popping up all over the city. This evolution of the Parisian food scene doesn't mean the quality of the cuisine

has been compromised – quite the contrary. Chefs have mastered the art of offering a rounded eating experience; because in the end eating remains synonymous with pleasure, a guiding principle in life for Parisians.

### Multi-food capital

In fact, if there is one thing to remember about Paris, it's that pleasure is a right. A duty, even. And that in part explains why Parisians will rarely settle for an average meal. "Food is one of the *arts de vivre*, or the arts of life, and Parisians cherish these arts with almost as much ardour as they do the more cerebral and exalted intellectual ones like painting, sculpture and music. The love of food and wine also expresses the ambient sensuality of the city, its rich public life and appetite for pleasure," explains American food journalist Lobrano.

Parisians take food very seriously and would never dream of sacrificing a meal for an average experience. This is what separates Paris dining from that of other cities. With the next generation of chefs experimenting with new ingredients and ways of doing things, the Parisian food scene is in complete flux. While still largely rooted in its historic culinary



Virginie Garnier (Frenchie)

Mus sim volo riam  
conserunt, odisi offri  
cab oribusae tatur