

# Paris on Foot: 35 Miles, 6 Days and One Blistered Toe

A journey around the perimeter of Paris, exploring neighborhoods well off the tourist-beaten path, revealed a city at once familiar and yet startlingly new.

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Not long ago, I spent a week walking around Paris. Before you yawn jadedly, let me clarify: I walked *all the way* around Paris. I began each day by donning a pair of beat-up Sauconys, consuming a prodigious breakfast at my hotel near the Porte Dorée, tucking a notebook and pen into my pocket, and proceeding on foot in a counterclockwise direction along the perimeter of the oval-shaped metropolis.

I did not visit the Latin Quarter, the Marais, or Montparnasse. I skipped the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and the Eiffel Tower. I neglected to slurp oysters at Le Procope, eat ice cream at Berthillon, or stroll along the banks of the Seine — though I crossed the oxbowed river several times along un-famous bridges. In all, I notched some 35 miles (resuming my journey each morning by taking the Métro roughly to where I'd left off the previous day), a trek that included centrifugal excursions into the collar suburbs and occasional dips into the outer precincts of the city proper.

During six days of wandering under miraculously cloudless skies this past May, I saw a Paris that was at turns familiar — the workaday brasseries and tabacs, the bakeries with their yeasty aromas and morning chitchat, the busy traffic circles — and eye-poppingly new to me: a vast and messy urban agglomeration that's home to the great majority of metropolitan Paris's 10 million residents.

Sitting at the edge of the canal in Pantin as the sky darkened, I stared open-mouthed for a long while at the modular-looking Neo-Brutalist structure housing the [Centre National de la Danse](#). Designed as a municipal building in 1972 by Jacques Kalisz, the gray concrete behemoth somehow radiated childlike exuberance and dystopian menace at the same time. A few days later, I would be similarly blown away by Edouard François's two-year-old M6B2, a 17-story balconied residential building at the edge of the 13th that's wrapped entirely in mesh, onto which hanging plants have been encouraged, with debatable success, to grow.



In Pantin, a modular-looking neo-Brutalist structure that in the early 1970s was designed as a municipal building now houses the Centre National de la Danse.

Joann Pai for The New York Times