

# Paris 4ever

Since 1869, the French capital has designated its arrondissements not by name, but by number. René Joseph takes us on a tour of the 4th, one of the most exciting neighbourhoods in Paris



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK/ANTHONY; PHOTOS: CHRIS COOPER



Outside the **Hôtel de Ville**, tourists and locals swarm around in front of the large white façade of this 19th-century building. Inside is an exhibition on the French poet and screenwriter Jacques Prévert, where you can read his words: "Paris is tiny for those, like us, who share such a great love."

The **Hôtel de Ville**, the capital's epicentre, is located in the 4th arrondissement. In Paris, the arrondissements don't have names, but, since the 1860s, numbers – from one to 20, spiralling around each other like an elegant snail shell. Each one is distinct, with a character all its own. The 4th is both one of the oldest and most stylish – a rainbow arrondissement.

An **accordionist sets** the rhythm on the Arcole bridge, which extends from the **Hôtel de Ville**. One hundred times a day, the old man on the Seine repeats the same *bal musette* tunes. His Parisian soundtrack probably hasn't changed in 50 years. From time to time, the comments by tour guides on the *bateaux-mouches* reach the riverbank.

Postcard-perfect decor stands at the far edge of the bridge on **Ile de la Cité**:



the towers of the **Conciergerie**, the stained-glass windows of **Sainte-Chapelle** and the flower market, while groups of tourists follow closed umbrellas carried like batons toward the cathedral of **Notre Dame de Paris**. With its five naves, three portals and galleries built to accommodate a multitude of worshippers, this religious edifice remains an iconic site in the French capital. It is the cathedral of all cathedrals. Legions of tourists enter by all sides, the south tower, the crypt, the sacristy housing the treasury. This afternoon, three horses carrying members of the Republican Guard ride by, while **Quasimodo** watches out for pickpockets high above.



OPPOSITE PAGE **Children playing in the Place des Vosges**  
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Beaubourg, Centre Pompidou; Musée Carnavalet; the Glace de Amorino ice cream parlour**

"Paris is tiny for those, like us, who share such a great love"

The **Square Jean XXIII** offers the best view of the cathedral: the back side and chevet. This is also where you'll start to see a surprising number of people with ice cream cones in hand, no matter what time of year it is. Bertillon, one of the



TOP: A former horse butchers, which is now a chic boutique  
LEFT: Some innovative parking of bicycles

BOTTOM LEFT: Pascal Vincent and his bookstore  
BOTTOM: Handmade toys inside the Tumbleweed shop



most widely acclaimed ice cream parlours in Paris, is just a few steps away, on Ile Saint-Louis. Since 1954, the famous family has been delighting children from nearby schools as well as tourists and aficionados alike. On offer: some 70 original flavours, all handmade on site, according to family tradition and expertise. "From my position, I can keep an eye on my father, my husband and my son, who all work in the back," says Marie-José Bertillon, the cheerful boss who oversees everything from behind the cash register.

The main street, Rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île, has a few art galleries, cosy restaurants, a stationery store run by a shopkeeper who is over 80 years old, and the oldest travel bookstore in Paris, aptly named Librairie Ulysse. The street is as straight and narrow as a French baguette. The shutters are often closed; this is an island of luxury and discretion.

Bottle-green bookstalls line the right bank, just a stone's throw away, along the quays listed as a UNESCO Heritage Site. The secondhand booksellers continue a tradition that dates back to 1578. Wearing a black fedora and red scarf, Pascal Vincent has occupied his small plot of sidewalk for 20 years. A former poet in Saint-Germain-des-Près, he wouldn't give up his stall along the Seine for anything: "I love Paris. I love books and I love watching the Seine. So I come every day, drink a few glasses of wine, listen to music and talk about books with people who pass by. Sometimes I even sell a book or two..." These booksellers are a breed apart, as they work outdoors every day.

A stroll along the Quays des Célestins and Quay Henri IV leads to the Port de l'Arsenal. A barge is slowly creeping forward, while the pleasure boats are moored one alongside another, under the watchful gaze of the Génie de la Liberté, the figure perched high on top of the Bastille column. Today, the boats are

named *Epicure*, *Lady Penhyric* and *Les Vieux Pupillons*. "Some are moored here year round, others are in transit. We have moorings for 170 boats. We handle nearly 1,500 per year; they are often tourists travelling down from the canals in the north who moor their boats for a few days while they visit Paris," explains Olivier Peresse-Gourbil, captain of the port, who's proud of this site, which many Parisians don't even know about.

A few metres from the boats, on the Place de la Bastille, the modern opera house sits on the site of the former prison, a symbol of the French Revolution in 1789. *Vélib* bikes, from the ingenious rental bike scheme that now forms part of the Paris landscape, slalom between the cars amid honking horns. The colourful and historic area of the Marais stretches behind the Rue Saint-Antoine, one of the city's oldest streets.

The Place des Vosges is a haven, hidden away from all the commotion, where the entire neighbourhood seems to converge at lunchtime. Completed in 1612 during the reign of Louis XIII – whose statue stands in the centre of the garden – the former royal square is surrounded by 36 bourgeois homes all with identical colours and designs. Several former ministers and a number of celebrities live here. Children, budding models (several agencies have set up shop in this area) and tourists enjoy the lawns under the lime trees. Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables*, lived here (1832-1848), in an apartment still open to the public.

The Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, to the west of the square, leads to a whole new world, where history steps aside for fashion and design. The beautiful old stones have disappeared behind brightly coloured shop windows. Paradoxically, the Marais may be one of the oldest parts of Paris, yet it looks to be one of the most modern and high-tech. Architects,



LEFT: Catherine Domain, owner of Librairie Ulysse, the oldest travel bookstore in Paris  
BELOW: Marie-José Bertillon and her daughter in their shop



graphic and fashion designers, and antique dealers compete with each other in a district that "bobos" (bohemian bourgeois) have colonised over the last

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few years. Art galleries and clothes shops have gradually replaced local businesses, and even the *falafel* and *shawarma* shops on the Rue des Rosiers (called Rue des Juifs, Street of the Jews, until 1900) have packed up.

The Marais, is a privileged neighbourhood that has transformed over the years into a superb "museum quarter" encompassing the Musée Picasso and the Musée Carnavalet, covering the entire history of Paris. It's also home to the futuristic and brightly coloured pipes of the Centre Pompidou, the iconic temple of contemporary art that has just celebrated its 30th year. In this part of the 4th, you're more likely to hear techno music than the sound of the accordion. <<

