

Nothing like Paris in the

destination

PARIS

BY GARY McDONALD



■ A LITTLE LUXURY: The master bedroom in the prestigious Montmartre apartment



Later in the week we transferred to Elegant Concorcet (property number 504424) in central Paris, a superb contemporary 70 sq m recently renovated apartment which oozes class and sophistication.

Located in the 9th district within a walking distance from Montmartre, Pigalle and the famous Le Moulin Rouge cabaret, as soon as you enter Concorcet a peaceful feeling comes over you, as if you have returned 'home'. And it really could be your home, if only for a short stay.

The best way to see the city and to appreciate its seductive architecture, its endless bistros, cafes and fine dining restaurants, and its nightlife, is by tucking a map in your pocket and allowing yourself to get lost on its streets and avenues. Apartment living makes all this enticingly possible.

They say there is no best time to visit Paris, because in every season the city is always alive. We chose to travel in the spring, and although it rained for practically the whole of our stay, it didn't detract from our enjoyment of the "other-worldliness" of Paris, where beauty and elegance are favoured over purpose and practicality.

Everywhere in Paris is easily accessible on the Metro or within walking distance, and during our holiday we visited many of its iconic attractions including the Notre Dame, Louvre, Arc De Triomphe and Eiffel Tower.

We cruised on the Seine, explored the boutiques, marvelled at the artists and painters, people-watched the stylish and flirtatious, and wandered through the many markets.

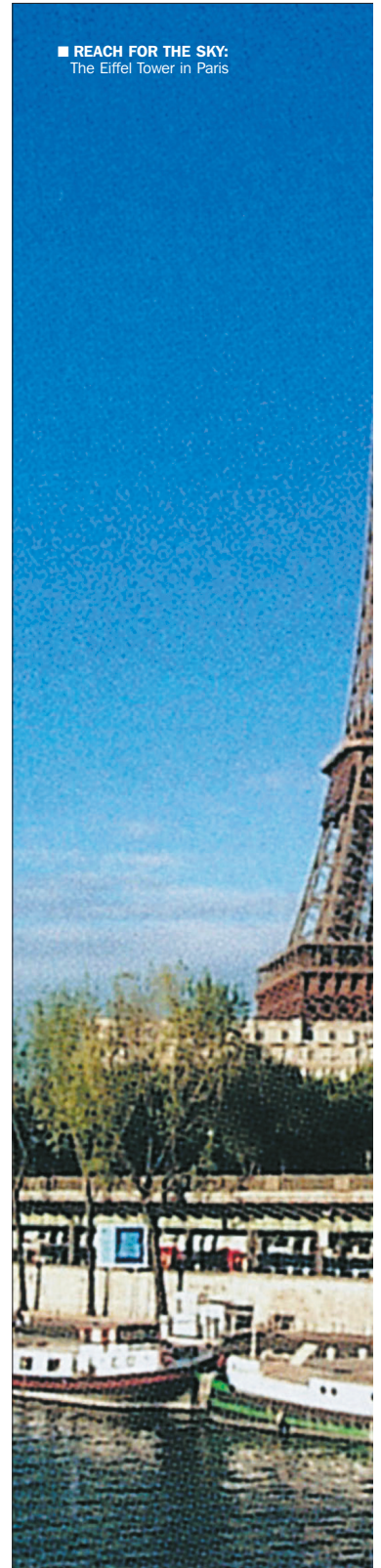
Oh yes, and one night we even cooked for ourselves. Nothing too fancy (let's call it our version of salade de tomate et concombre to start and then steak cru sauce tartare frites for main).

Apartment living, you see, lets you do that. It was our first time glimpsing the city as proper Parisians, and it won't be the last.

They say Paris is the hardest city in the world to leave (even when it rains incessantly). Yet however long you spend here, you just know you're certain to return...

■ For more information regarding renting apartments in Paris, contact Holiday-Rentals.co.uk

■ REACH FOR THE SKY: The Eiffel Tower in Paris



IT'S impossible not to fall in love with Paris, that tres chic city serving as the beautiful backdrop to so many things of life, be it love or fashion, rugby or revolution. I'd been there once for romance, spending the last night of my honeymoon under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower two decades ago.

Three times, too, I'd watched error-strewn Ireland rugby performances in the Stade France, most memorably (or forgettably?) a 37-17 St Valentine's Day massacre in 2004.

On those four visits combined, however, I'd begrudgingly fitted in a couple of open-top bus tours, a handful of decent restaurants and, let's say, lots of other stuff.

But to enjoy Paris to its intoxicating full, to feel its heartbeat and to truly experience its style and charm, takes time. Lots of it.

Returning recently with my wife and two teenage children, I abandoned the usual notion of staying in a hotel and opted for a period of apartment living.

London-based Holiday-Rentals.co.uk, our hosts, have more than 830 apartments in central Paris, from bohemian to belle epoque, with prices ranging from as little as £25 per person a night for cute little studios, to around £50 to £80 per person per night for luxurious, boutique-style apartments.

Here was our chance to live for a time in Paris as the Parisians do, waking to the sound of church bells ringing high above Montmartre, indulging in that preferred French pastime of sitting on le terrace with a cup of fresh brewed coffee and a warm croissant.

In the course of our break we stayed in two uniquely individual apartments, from each of which we took full advantage of the produce markets and the famous patisseries and charcuteries in the surrounding arrondissements.

Prestigious Montmartre (property number 96748) is a luxurious two-bedroom apartment with balcony overlooking a park in the heart of residential Montmartre.

Square Carpeaux is literally next door, inviting us to relax and read a book or just bask in the Paris sunshine (not, unfortunately, that we experienced much of it on this particular break).

The quiet surroundings of Marcadet proved hugely inviting after a day's sightseeing. The surrounding area is home to some excellent restaurants while our apartment was a short stroll from Sacre Coeur, one of Paris' most visited sites and the ideal point from which to get a view of the city and walk in the footsteps of the great painters and sculptors.

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Advertising over 120,000 properties worldwide, the site (www.holiday.rentals.co.uk) receives over 45,000 visits every day.

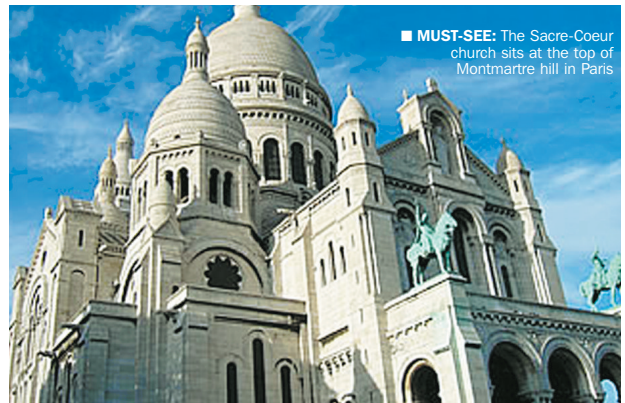
■ Our family flew from Belfast City Airport to Paris with flybe, one of Europe's largest regional airlines.

With over 190 routes serving 12 countries, it operates from a total of 67 departure points – 34 in the UK and 33 in Europe.

springtime (or any time)



■ **HOME FROM HOME:** Lounge area in the apartment at Condorcet



■ **MUST-SEE:** The Sacre-Coeur church sits at the top of Montmartre hill in Paris

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