

PARIS FOOD HISTORY WALKS

Old restaurants and cafes

This walk will take you to most of Paris' oldest surviving restaurants and to the sites of some which have disappeared. It has the advantage of taking you through busy and colorful areas with a lot to see along the way. It should take about two hours, unless you decide to stop along the way.

Note that in general this tour is of the *outside* of these businesses; please bear in mind these are not museums, but working restaurants. Some are more casual than others, but most will not welcome visitors stopping in for a look around. (Several are also very expensive and require reservations.)

Only the most general directions are provided here. Most strollers today will find it easiest to use a map application to find the best route from one place to the next. Otherwise, using a good physical map should be easy enough; every metro stop displays one of these, and often a detailed map of the neighborhood as well.

To download a PDF of this walk, click [here](#).

Start at metro *Grands Boulevards*. Go west to the rue de Faubourg Montmartre and a short way north to number 7.

Bouillon Chartier

*7 rue de Faubourg
Montmartre*

This is at the rear of a small courtyard. Even from the outside, it is quite lovely.

The Chartier brothers did not invent the Bouillons, which were created and developed into a chain by Duval in the nineteenth century. But Duval's have all closed, while some of theirs survive, including this, the original. Despite its elegant air, this and other bouillons were once popular options for budget dining.

It is about a ten minute walk south to the next restaurant. Return south to the boulevard Poissonnière, cross it and turn right. Continue until the rue Vivienne. Turn left and walk several blocks until you pass the rue Colbert. A bit further down on the left you will find the Grand Colbert.

Le Grand Colbert

2, rue Vivienne

This was a fancy dry goods shop in the nineteenth century. By 1867, a Colbert restaurant was listed at this address. The space has had a mixed history since, but currently has (more or less restored) period décor.

A short walk south and a right on the Rue de Beaujolais will bring you to the sign for Véfour.

Le Grand Véfour

17, rue de Beaujolais

You can see part of the restaurant (and its high-priced menu) from the Rue de Beaujolais, but you will want to go into the Palais Royal to see more of it. This restaurant is descended from the Cafe de Chartres, which was one of the first businesses to open in the Palais Royal; it has a good claim to being Paris' oldest restaurant, even if it has shut down at times. Though the sumptuous décor has been restored, it gives a good idea of what an elegant restaurant looked like in the nineteenth century.

you can simply order a coffee and sit on the terrace to people watch (or take a break from this tour, for instance).

Walk south from the Père Tranquille to the corner of the main complex. (The square fountain at left stands on the site of the cemetery where the original market began modestly before becoming the huge Halles.) Turn right. Walk until you reach the rue Pont Neuf.

OPTIONAL: Here you can take a detour if you want to see the (approximate) site of the first restaurant. If you're happy to use your imagination, head west to the rue de Louvre and south below the rue St. Honoré.

SITE of the first restaurant
Rue du Louvre south of Rue St. Honoré

When this part of the rue du Louvre was called the "rue des Poulies", Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau opened the first "restorer" somewhere on it, selling "restorants" (*restaurants*). Soon after the new establishment moved to the Hotel d'Aligre, on the western corner of the street, along the rue St. St. Honoré. The whole street has been rebuilt since and so there is no sign of either location. But every Western-style restaurant in the world ultimately descends from one steps away from where you stand.

Return east to the rue Pont Neuf.

Turn right on to the rue Pont Neuf and walk south. *If* the Chien Qui Fume is still open, you will come to it in a few steps.

Au Chien Qui Fume
33 rue du Pont Neuf

In 1899, a "Guide to the Pleasures of Paris" advised having oysters or onion soup at the "Smoking Dog", but also warned that at three in the morning the place was lined with *soupeuses* waiting for a mark. The restaurant closes earlier now and has calmed down overall (if in fact it is still open – recent reports are uncertain).

Continue south until the Pont Neuf bridge. Cross it, going past the island all the way over to the opposite (Left) bank. Then turn left and go east until the next cross street. You will now be across from Lapérouse.

Lapérouse
51 quai des Grands Augustins

This restaurant is one of the few to preserve its *cabinets particuliers* (private rooms). In the nineteenth century, the poultry market (the "Valley of Misery") was on this quai. In the morning, some dealers would use the restaurant's private rooms to conduct business. But these rooms served a very different purpose when couples used them in the evening. (This was not unusual – all the best restaurants then offered *cabinets particuliers*.)

Go back to the end of the Pont Neuf and turn left, heading south down the rue Dauphine. When you come to a crossroads (the Carrefour de Buci), head south on the second street at left (the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie). A few steps further south will bring you to the site of the first really famous cafe in Paris.

SITE of the first famous cafe in Paris
Café Procope
13 rue de l'Ancienne Comédie

While others had opened cafes in Paris in the seventeenth century, Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli's was the first to be immensely successful. After he bought it in 1686 he decorated it elegantly, establishing a standard for the best cafes going forward. As Procope's it became a major literary hang-out and endured into the nineteenth century, becoming Zoppi's and then again Procope's. After the cafe closed in 1890, the space hosted various businesses, including, in 1928, a vegetarian restaurant.

Today a restaurant occupies the space and uses the original name. But don't even *think* about just

stopping by for a coffee.

Continue south to the boulevard St. Germain and turn right. Continue for about a block to number 142 and the Vagenende.

Vagenende The Vagenende was once another Chartier bouillon and has retained a great deal of its early
142, boulevard St twentieth century décor.
Germain

Continue several blocks west, just past the Saint-Germain-des-Prés church. You will now be facing the Deux-Magots cafe; just beyond it is the Cafe de Flore.

Les Deux Magots The cafe which opened here at the end of the nineteenth century began as a fancy goods shop which
6 place Saint- had moved from another location and was named for the statues of two Chinese mandarins which can
Germain des Prés still be seen today. Its strongest claim to fame dates to the Fifties and Sixties, when it became a literary
hangout (the neighborhood once hosted a number of publishers).

Café de Flore The Flore too opened at the end of the nineteenth century, shortly before the Deux Magots. Like its
172 boulevard St neighbor, it became a literary fixture later in the twentieth century.
Germain

Look across the Boulevard St. Germain and you will see the Brasserie Lipp. Cross over to take a better look.

Brasserie Lipp A number of *brasseries* (literally, “breweries”), mainly Alsatian, had opened in Paris by 1880, when
151 Boulevard Leonard Lipp opened the Brasserie des Bords du Rhin, which soon became known simply as the
Saint-Germain Brasserie Lipp. After Marcelin Cazes bought it in 1920, he made a conscious effort to develop its
cultural role, establishing an important literary prize there in 1934. The brasserie has attracted not only
literary but political and other important figures since.

From here, it is a slightly longer walk (15-20 minutes) to the last two sites. Luckily, you are in one of Paris’ most lively and walkable areas.

Walk west on the boulevard St. Germain until the rue de Condé (if you come to the Odéon metro stop, you’ve gone too far). Cross to the opposite side, then turn right and walk a short way down, sticking to your left, until the first sharp turn left. You should now be on the rue Monsieur Le Prince. Continue several blocks until you cross the rue Racine. Just after that, you will find Polidor on your left.

Polidor In the nineteenth century, creameries and dairies began to serve light food to go with their milk and
41 rue Monsieur le cream. Some, including Polidor, became full-on restaurants. In the Twenties, Polidor also became a
Prince major literary hangout (as seen in “Midnight in Paris”).

Now return to the rue Racine and turn right. Walk about three-quarters of the way to the end of the street. You will now undoubtedly notice the Bouillon Racine.

Bouillon Racine Opened in 1906, this is yet another Chartier Bouillon. If this one looks particularly magnificent, it is
3 rue Racine because it was once the pride of the chain, known as the “Grand Bouillon”. It has had a mixed history
since its heyday, but now, much restored, is a glorious sight.

And so this walk ends, having taken you from one Bouillon to another. Other older restaurants are scattered through Paris, but here at its heart you have seen the bulk of them; enough to envision yourself dining in the Paris of another time.