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7 of the Best Places to Eat in Paris on a Sunday

BY ALEXANDER LOBRANO



Sundays in Paris can surprise with a soft thud of disappointment, since most shops and restaurants are closed. Once you get used to the stillness of the city, it has a certain melancholy charm, but the problem remains: Where to eat? The answer used to be brasseries like La Coupole and the Brasserie Balzar, but quality has tanked as their prices have gone up. So here's where the locals go for a delicious *dejeuner ou diner on dimanche*.

1. *L'Ambassade d'Auvergne*, 22 rue du Grenier Saint-Lazare, 3rd Arrondissement, (33) 01-42-72-31-22. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

This rustic family-run auberge feels more like a place you'd find in a sleepy French provincial town, maybe Vichy or Aurillac, than Paris, which is why it's surprising it's never been shopped as a set for a Woody Allen film. Beyond the charmingly unselfconscious '50s-time-warp décor, Parisians love it for its easygoing prices, friendly service, and hearty, well-cooked only-in-France comfort food from the mountainous south-central Auvergne — think lentil salad with *lardons* (chunks of bacon) and grilled sausage with *aligot* (potatoes whipped with garlic and Tomme cheese curds).

2. *Café des Musées*, 49 rue de Turenne, 4th Arrondissement, (33) 01-42-72-96-17. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

There are few really good bistros open on Sunday in Paris, which is why this small casual place decorated with antique posters in the Marais is always packed (book ahead to get a table on Sunday night). Saucy waiters sling seriously good French comfort food from a chalkboard menu that changes regularly but almost always offers some of the finest chicken-liver terrine in town and some of the best *steak frites*, since these fries are homemade from fresh potatoes. Don't miss the smoked-garlic soup from the north of France if it's on the menu, and in season, the menu's game dishes are terrific, too.

3. *Les Tablettes de Jean-Louis Nomicos*, 16 Avenue Bugeaud, 16th Arrondissement, (33) 01-56-28-16-16. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

For a big night out without either breaking the bank or suffering someplace stuffy, this good-looking Michelin one-star restaurant with apricot velvet banquettes and a curving basket-weave wall by interior designer Anne-Cécile Comar is a great bet. Chef Jean-Louis Nomicos, a native of Marseille, riffs a suave but sincere Provençal take on classical French haute cuisine with dishes like deconstructed bouillabaisse, sea bass with baby peas and caviar, free-range chicken with stuffed morel mushrooms and asparagus, and pistachio and citrus tarts. The menu also boasts a good choice of interesting and affordable wines.

4. *Huitrière Régis*, 3 rue Montfaucon, 6th Arrondissement, (33) 01-44-41-10-07. Open Tuesday to Sunday for lunch and dinner. Closed Monday.

With only 14 covers in a tiny storefront place with a white-painted beamed ceiling in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, this bivalve bar comes off as one of the most exclusive non-members-only clubs on the Left Bank. They don't take reservations, so get here early. Even then, you may have to wait, since Régis's oysters come from the Marennes-Oléron on France's Atlantic coast, and they're so head-bangingly good no one minds the house rule of having to order a dozen a piece. Otherwise, the only thing on occasional offer are clams, sea snails, shrimp, and sea urchins, plus a short but really good list of Loire Valley whites.

5. *Semilla*, 54 rue de Seine, 6th Arrondissement, (33) 01-43-54-34-50. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

Right in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, this modern bistro by a team of the Left Bank's best restaurateurs — Miami-born Juan Sanchez and New Zealander Drew Harré, who also run the excellent La Dernière Goutte wine shop and very good Cosi sandwich shop, respectively — rocks an art-gallery vibe with an open kitchen, steel ventilation ducts overhead, and exposed stone walls. A cosmopolitan crowd loves the inventive menu, which changes regularly but runs to dishes like superb Corsican charcuterie from Pascal Fiori, Irish smoked salmon, squid risotto with a persillade, blanquette de veau, cheeses from Quatrehommes, and shortbread with lemon cream and meringue. Friendly service, moderately priced and a good time.

6. *Le Stella*, 133 avenue Victor Hugo, 16th Arrondissement, (33) 01-56-90-56-00. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

If you've ever fantasized about climbing into an Éric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard, or François Truffaut film, you'll love the 1950s-vintage *mise-en-scène* of this unselfconsciously haute bourgeois brasserie, the kind of place that makes Paris Paris. Cinematography aside, the food — solid Gallic grub like oysters, smoked salmon, steak tartare, grilled sole, or blanquette de veau — is excellent, the vry waiters wear black aprons, and the people watching is nonpareil. Reservations are essential.

7. *Le Richer*, 2 rue Richer, 9th Arrondissement, no phone/no reservations, open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

So what happens if it's Sunday in Paris, and you blew off the whole reservations thing, because you're on vacation and needed a nap? This funky place with exposed stone walls and a young crowd in the rough-and-tumble but increasingly bobo neighborhood around the rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis will forgive you and feed you well, too. It's the sister restaurant to L'Office, a very popular bistro across the street run by Frenchman Charles Compagnon, who returned to Paris after a stint in New York a couple of years ago. This explains why this place could be a Parisian cousin to Manhattan's Estela — think a chalkboard menu of nifty, inventive, produce-centric dishes that changes all of the time; smart service; mostly organic wines. Examples include cardamom-roasted lamb with potato emulsion and pan-roasted duckling breast with gnocchi, beets, and a molé-spiked nougatine.

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