



The Richelieu Public National Library in Paris



Paris

For a literary fix

During the early 20th century, Paris was a hotbed of social, intellectual, and artistic experiments. American and British expat writers were being lured to the city in search of a life, free of restraints. This 'Lost Generation' settled in the St-Germain des Près on the Left Bank and produced some of the greatest works of literature of the times.

words // Punita Malhotra

Today, the rich literary history of the Rive Gauche lives on through its bookstores and publishing houses...the torchbearers of a much-loved tradition. The City of Lights continues to thrive as a mecca for all breeds of writers, from the amateur to the accomplished. A pilgrimage destination for die-hard fans of the written word.

PAYING HOMAGE TO THE HUMBLE HOME

It's a parallel Paris this side of the Seine... artsy, bohemian and literary. Boulevard St Germain and Boulevard St Michel run like two main arteries through *Le Quartier Latin* (Latin Quarter). Haussmann-styled buildings create perfect harmony and medieval alleys lead off in different directions. There's enough to tempt the eye...pizzerias and pubs, crêperies and cafes, classy home décor shops, upper-crest fashion boutiques, gourmet food



Inside the house-turned-museum of French poet and novelist Victor Hugo

There's an added bonus for avid bookworms... exclusive boutique hotels where literary geniuses from around the world, once stayed.

stores and trendy chains. But back then in the monochrome age, it was the unorthodox air of the 5th and 6th Arrondissements (Parisian administrative districts) that attracted struggling expat writers. There they sought solace in humble dwellings and worked out of cramped studios until fame finally kissed their foreheads. Luckily, many of these celebrity addresses survive.

Uncurbed imagination will tell

ardent Hemingway admirers why the writer chose to make the Left Bank his home and dedicated his posthumously-published memoir, *A Moveable Feast* to the charismatic city. It's not just him, many more famous addresses from the era litter the streets. There's Henry Miller (best known for his loosely autobiographical novel, *Tropic of Cancer*), Jean-Paul Sartre (French novelist and figurehead of Existentialism), and Victor Hugo (synonymous with *Les*

Misérables and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). Also a bandwagon of local ladies who redefined feminism...Colette (author of the classic *Chéri*), novelist Aurore Dupin (known better by her pen name George Sand), American food writer and TV host Julia Child and existentialist philosopher-writer Simone de Beauvoir (of *The Second Sex* fame). And they were a tight-knit community. American novelist-poet-playwright Gertrude Stein, who coined the term 'Lost

| ESSENTIALS | COUNTRY France | LANGUAGE French | CURRENCY Euro | TEMPERATURE (April-May) 15°C (max), 7°C (min) |
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Upcoming Events in **PARIS**

Paris Art Fair
April 4 - 7

**International Rare Book
and Autograph Fair**
April 11-14

Taste of Paris Fair
May 9 - 12

**Saint Germaine Jazz
Festival**
May 16 - 27

**Roland Garros French
Open**
May 26 - June 9

Generation', hosted regular Saturday evening congregations of writers and artists in the league of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

There's an added bonus for avid bookworms...exclusive boutique hotels where the literary geniuses once stayed. Check-ins on offer for those who care to make a divine connection. Hôtel Le Saint, where James Joyce finished *Ulysses*. Hôtel Pont Royal, the chosen haunt of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Hotel Monte Cristo, inspired by Alexandre Dumas, author of *Count of Monte Cristo*. Pick of the best? The opulently dressed, peacock-wallpapered Oscar Wilde suite of L'Hôtel, which displays a framed copy of the Irish poet and playwright's last hotel bill.

SALUTING THE CAFE INSTITUTION

It's an effortless time travel to the 'Années folles' (crazy years) when Parisian cafés were institutions. Influentials would sit for hours, engaged in profound discussions on art, literature and politics. First off, the city's oldest café from 1686, Le Procope, which takes the credit for introducing the French cafe culture. Chocolate chaud is a house special...a dedication to the hundreds of chocolate-mixed espressos that Voltaire used to dunk down here everyday. Another cafe to root for is the Les Deux Magots, founded in 1875. This favourite haunt of Hemingway was where Picasso is said to have invented Cubism. If one has the capacity for a third coffee, it must be at Café de Flore, where Albert Camus, Pablo Picasso, James Joyce



Café de Flore, one of the oldest running cafes in Paris, used to be the glittering intellectual hub of the Parisian literary circle



You can fly to Paris with Vistara's interline partners Air France, Finnair, Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines.

and philosopher couple Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were regular patrons.

Alfresco seating on the cobblestone pavements is very appealing, but so is a table in the bustling interior, surrounded by rich wood panelling, gilt-edged mirrors, lavish chandeliers, marble tabletops, dreamy oil paintings and delicate china. It's unreal to even think that a century ago, coffee was considered to be a beverage for revolutionaries! Intense debates have given way to relaxed conversations, but locals still sip evergreen favourites... 'café au lait' (hot, strong filter coffee or a double espresso, and half milk, often

frothed), 'petit noir' (espresso) or 'café noir' (black coffee). The aura of the French cafe continues to be as infectious today as it was back then.

Writers still show up, as do celebs from all walks of life. It wouldn't be surprising to bump into Paulo Coelho. "Can one desire too much of a good thing?" asked Shakespeare in Act 4 of his play *As you like it*. No one would dare to disagree.

CELEBRATING BIBLIOPHILIA

The hangover of history continues as one heads to the most famous bookstore in the city. The original bookshop of Shakespeare & Co. closed in the 1940s and what one sees now is the second *avatar* from

1951. The crooked lettering on the signboard gives away the charming surprise package that awaits inside. Piled on bent shelves, stacked casually on low tables, crammed under staircase nooks and stuffed into mismatched boxes, the book collection seems to have expanded far beyond the proportions that the store had bargained for. Second-hand books stand shoulder-to-shoulder with signed editions... all loyal sentinels to the good old glory days.

Many stories were born in this English-language bookshop, founded in 1919 by Sylvia Beach, the patron saint of authors. What was once a local haunt for writers like Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce, still houses 13 beds in its upper storey, where 40,000 struggling writers have slept over the years, their eyes filled with dreams of churning out bestsellers of tomorrow. The mundane act of picking up a copy of Hemingway's *Life in Paris* from one of the shelves can be a surreal experience, knowing that the writer himself used to borrow books from its rental library.

Nothing could be a more apt sundowner to an enriching day in the Latin Quarter than a stroll along the iconic green-painted makeshift bouquinistes (bookstalls) lining the river banks. Hours fly past as one indulges in a quintessentially Parisian pastime... browsing for antiquarian leather-bound books, vintage postcards, colourful posters and amateur paintings depicting romantic scenes of the city. An eternal F. Scott Fitzgerald quote comes to mind... "That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong". 🌸

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Shakespeare and Company has been featured in Hollywood films like *Before Sunset*, *Midnight in Paris* and *Julie & Julia*