



Savouring the soul of

# Paris

All the finest foodie things in life can be found, tasted and, in some cases, taken home in Paris. This short but sweet trip into the glamorous metropolis goes to the soul of Parisian epicurean heaven, from petite to grand, basics to luxuries

Words by Tamara Thiessen

The little card I carry away with me from the boulangerie on Boulevard Malesherbes has a photo of a baker's hands in close-up, kneading dough. The card has a traditional look, and is marked with a classy signature, Eric Kayser Artisan Boulanger – and the caption 'Quality, love, savoir-faire, evolution & tradition... savour in short'. It further promises, 'From a base of natural leaven and rigorously selected flours, the pure butter viennoiseries, the fine patisseries, the gourmet sandwiches, all of the products are made on the premises'.

This is precisely the kind of assurance of quality and authenticity that French people expect when it comes to food, and whether it is fancy or basic, that flair is always there. And, as food products go, none are more essential – nor more artistic – than French breads. Having discovered this store by chance, I now set out to discover its products and partake of its pleasures. And I leave with bags stuffed full of all kinds of gorgeous looking doughy, bready, cakey things.

Paris is like a Louis XVI writing desk, packed with petite pullout drawers of epicurean surprises ready to be savoured by the casual stroller. It seems everyone knows to head to Fauchon for gastronomic souvenirs of Paris – from gorgeously packaged chocolates, foies gras, Champagne and even tea. But many of the smaller places for fine food – the *bonnes* ▶





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addresses as they are called – the boulangerie, pâtisserie, confiserie, chocolaterie and épicerie for bread, cakes, candy, chocolate and other delicacies – are best stumbled upon by chance and their produce enjoyed on the spot, treating your taste buds to truly Parisian delights.

Proclaimed as Paris's best bread maker, there are several Eric Kayser shops between the Left Bank, in the arty-intellectual Latin quarter, and neighbouring Saint Germain des Prés; and on the Right Bank, in the residential fashion and business crossroads of the 8th district. The shops are developing into something of a concept by mixing the traditional bakery with restaurants. The Boulangerrestaurant at 85 boulevard Malesherbes, for example, serves up organic pastas, salads, fish and meats alongside gorgeous tarts in a chic but unfussy atmosphere – a 'décor design' as the store says – with the added possibility of a glass of wine or Champagne.

Another novelty, overseen by famous French chef Alain Ducasse, is a mix of boulangerie and fine food store or épicerie. Be 'boulang&picier' at

73 Boulevard de Courcelles produces excellent quality take-away salads, sandwiches, soups and other snacks. 'Here you will find simple and authentic values in the food,' says Ducasse, 'the good, the fine, the genuine.' In May, the first Café Be opened on the third floor of Printemps de la Maison (the home and interiors part of the famous department store) on busy Boulevard Haussmann.

Rich in aromas of fine produce, the avenues of the 8th district form a fashionable Parisian village, secreted between the Opéra, the Champs Elysées and Parc Monceau. I am amazed at how many flavours old and new I unearth, and how many last-minute classy gourmet gifts I am able to gather, within a couple of hours of straying from a big velvet armchair in the art deco surrounds of Le Safran, the Hilton Arc de Triomphe's restaurant on rue de Courcelles.

The first stop is Hédiard at 106 Boulevard de Courcelles. I am lured from over the road into this red-and-black boudoir of fine delicatessen produce – of tinned terrines and take-home pâtés, jars of jams and biscuits in gorgeous, signature-colour tins. The business was originally founded by Ferdinand Hédiard in 1855 as the 'Counter of Spices from the Colonies' and it still has exotic overtones and a commitment to sourcing the best produce, spices and all things nice, from all over the world. 'For 150 years the house specialities haven't changed but they have been enriched,' says President Dominique Richard. And with some 6,000 products on its books, the 'maison Hédiard' is considered a specialist in coffee, with 35 varieties, tea, 240 varieties and wine – and there is a highly experienced *maître* in charge of each line. The crème de la crème for many people are its crystallised fruit jellies – the *pâtes du fruit* – of which it sells 60 tonnes a year – and the jams, or rather superior *confitures naturelles*, which top 80 tonnes a year.

Ladurée on the Champs-Elysées is one of the most deliciously inventive patisseries of Paris in form and filling. Its fresco and cherub-decorated tearoom, or salon du thé, Ladurée Royale is at 16 rue Royale. The maison's time-honoured macaroons recently featured in a French women's magazine list of 'I want them straight away' things – a list which also included Louis Vuitton sunglasses, a super light Sportsac and Gucci scarf!

## Fresh, healthy but deliciously decadent – now that is totally French



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The proof of their incredible popularity is, as they say, in the pudding. With a team of 85 pastry cooks, Ladurée makes over eight million macaroons a year and sells about 10,000 every day in its four establishments. Add to that, thousands of croissants, chocolate tarts, lemon tarts, praline and rum millefeuilles, and you can start to understand the scale.

The same family are behind the 250 'Paul' bakeries – a chain that produces high-quality traditional breads and pastries along with delicious ready-to-go baguettes, croques monsieur, tarts and flans. 'You must remember that we have been bread makers for more than 200 years with a very rich savoir faire which endures, and which we stick to strongly,' says David Holder, the young American-educated Vice Chairman of the company.

Twice a year Ladurée presents a new collection of macaroons, cakes, pastries and chocolates – many of which you can buy in the most delicious packaging, oozing with Parisian flair. Indulge too in some of their fabulous cake creations – pastries with passion – quite literally in the case of the red and white 'baiser' or kiss cake. Perhaps you would prefer a garish but gorgeously coloured choux pastry: the black truffle and blackcurrant or violet 'religieuse'. And for those who fear cravings, you can take home a macaroon-scented Ladurée *Parfum de Maison* – one of several existing scents for the home, in a line which includes elaborate gift boxes, tea sets and candles.

Dalloyau, and you could never doubt it, is a master of its trade. Under one roof the 'Maison of Gastronomy founded in 1802' brings together about 300 master cooks, pastry, chocolate, jam, ice-cream and bread makers. The main store, at 101 Faubourg Saint Honore, is a sensorial showcase of class behind glass, with its powdered-rose-seated restaurant and a highly prized wine cellar downstairs.

The way I discovered Dalloyau was by way of a chunk of dark nutty chocolate I bought at Lafayette Gourmet, the food hall of Galeries Lafayette on Boulevard Haussmann. In fact the produce of many of these businesses congregate under the roof of the city's *grands magasins*, the luxury department stores – Galeries Lafayette and Printemps on the Right Bank and Le Bon Marché on the Left.

1: BOULANGERIE EK AT ODÉON

2: RESTAURANT KAYSER

3: ALAIN DUCASSE'S BOULANGÉPICIER, 'BE'

4: INSIDE THE BOUTIQUE MADELEINE MAI

5: LA GRAND EPICERIE IN SAINT GERMAIN DES PRÉS

6: EXTERIOR OF BOUTIQUE MADELEINE MAI

The importance of food in the daily life of Parisians is played out with panache between their cheese, bread and fish traders, caterers and delicatessens, wine cellars, cafés and restaurants. La Grande Epicerie in Saint Germain des Prés is a giant food emporium and epicurean grocer, steeped in Left Bank chic which lies at the heart of Le Bon Marché store, with its personal shopping, VIP services and art-studded walls. The grocery stocks 5,000 international products as well as hundreds of fresh-from-the marketplace French goods. 'Every morning our culinary teams select the finest, freshest produce,' says the store's Director of Gastronomy Jean-Jacques Massé. 'They also go directly to the producers and pick out the rarest products of the best quality, sometimes almost unobtainable.'

After making your own selection from the hundreds of fresh breads, cheeses and yogurts on display – and the exquisite looking sushi, skewers, salads and desserts – you are ready to picnic in style in the Jardins du Luxembourg or in front of the Eiffel Tower. But if you need a little bit of refuelling before you go, head upstairs for a 'snack chic' in the store's café, the Delicabar. The lime green, red and white lounge designed by Claudio Colucci is very cinematic in itself, while the 'stars' of the menu are vegetables, fruit and chocolate. Fresh, healthy but deliciously decadent – now that is totally French. Bon appetit! ■