

How to Catch a Bus in Paris

One of the most common questions I get asked about Paris is, "How easy is it to get around by bus?".

My answer is, "It's very easy, once you know how."

OK that doesn't sound very helpful, but what I'm trying to say is that catching a bus in a foreign city is no harder than anything else you're likely to do, but when it's something you've never done before, you have a fear factor - the fear of the unknown.

I'll explain to you how to make sure you don't get lost on a bus in Paris, and then your fear factor will disappear.

All cities around the world where there are buses have timetables. These days you can look up bus and other transport timetables on the internet, and you can also get a printed timetable. When you're standing at a bus stop in Paris, you will also see terrific maps to help you work out where you want to go.

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TRUE STORY ...

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You don't really need to speak French to catch a bus in Paris, you just need to know the name of the street and area (suburb) where you want to go, and if you plan on returning, make sure you know your return address. Have BOTH of these written down so you can show the bus driver if he can't understand you.

Don't laugh about having your return address on you - I know people who've forgotten where they're staying when they're on holidays. Generally they get to their accommodation, leave their luggage in the hostel, hotel or friend's apartment, then excitedly head out for a day or evening of adventure.

When it's time to come home, they may discover they left the address with all their worldly possessions ... at their accommodation. It's easier said than done - trust me.

I heard a story from a friend of mine this week whose daughter went to Paris to stay with friends and did exactly that. She headed out to meet friends for dinner and music, and even managed to get the bus back to her friend's apartment ... but didn't know which apartment on which floor.

So what did she do? Burst into tears of course, and someone kindly stopped to help her. Luckily they found an all-night cafe close by where the girl could stay safe and warm, and where she could keep an eye on the building until her friend left for work the next day. It's evidently not very comfortable to stay in a cafe from midnight to 7am :-)

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INSIDE THE BUS

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Once you're in the bus there are 3 things which I really like:

- a simple to follow bus map along the edge of the roof of the bus
- a clock at the front of the bus so you can make sure you're on time
- friendly people who are willing to help if you look or feel lost.

Parisians are friendly and sympathetic, so don't be embarrassed to ask for help. Show people the piece of paper you're carrying with the address of where you're going, and they will be able to help you.

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THINGS TO REMEMBER

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- always have something on you which says the full address and phone number where you're going
- always carry a map with your accommodation marked on it clearly, so you can find your way home
- make sure you have your friend's or the hotel's phone number with you
- be polite, say "Merci!" for "Thank you!", and "Pardon" for "Excuse me."

Most of all, enjoy the adventure of being in a foreign city - acknowledge the fact that you're bound to make a few mistakes along the way, and laugh them off when they happen. You'll have a much more enjoyable trip if you do.

Bon voyage, and don't forget to have fun!

About the Author

Teena Hughes is an Australian who has lived in Paris and loves all things French. Teena's website is a warm and entertaining place to visit, seen through the eyes of someone who clearly loves Paris. <http://www.a-night-in-paris.com/getting-around-in-paris.html>

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