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## Paris

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# PARIS

## COOPER SCOLLAN



Oh to be in Paris. Paris, just like the movies. Just like the image. Just like the romance. It is as beautiful as one could conceive, and as inspiring as one wants it to be. As you visit the sites, eat the food, and try to become a part of this breathtaking city, you are left in a state of constant emotional tickle. But to be in Paris, you must try to act like a Parisian. Not a tourist. This is never easy, but as a foreigner one must attempt to be a part of a culture that is very strange, surreal, and in Paris, always appetizing.

It is mildly unfortunate to observe American's lined up at Strabucks or McDonalds when a whole new world of food and beverages are all around, yet we are all creatures of habit. We do what is comfortable, familiar and what brings us repetitive and constant pleasure, even if we don't realize it. Traveling is the great liberator, freeing us from our familial and homely moorings, and forcing us to branch out and dabble in the unexpected, in the unknown.

In Paris, there are new languages, new people, new food, sights and sensations. Every step is unexpected and alive with anticipation. In a way it's a crapshoot, but one that's constantly filled with effervescent rewards and serendipitous outcomes.

The truth and reality of our misconceptions and ever-so-apparent naiveté becomes abundantly apparent as we struggle for the seemingly simple things like directions. It's all there on the map, easy as pie (or an éclair), yet finding your way out of the Louvre can be as treacherous as traversing a labyrinth in Dorset, England.

It's hard not to deny the longing of being in love in Paris. I guess it's no mystery, as we have been inundated with the image ever since we were old enough to watch T.V. Everywhere you go, everywhere you turn there is love all around you. Even the pigeons, sitting under an eave in the rain seem euphoric and love-happy. Parisian couples hand in hand seem to glide rather than walk. If I had a Euro for every prototypical passionate corner make-out session I witnessed, I may never have come home (or I would've purchased a modest chateau with a Bordeaux vineyard in the south of France).

Typically the French are quite attractive and well dressed. Many Parisian women are like the birds of Central America: colorful, beautiful and simply everywhere. Some of the French men are like the crocodiles on the La Coste shirts that us tourist wear.

They wait ever patiently, eyeballing, subtly transfixed on the young and naive female Americans. They say a few words, smile, and slowly inhale their cigarette, like a confident poker player with an inside hand.

Cigarettes in Paris are everywhere. People hold onto them stoically, with ashes hanging down like oversized fingernails. Smoke permeates the indoor air, and one can't help but think, "these people live longer than any of us?" Children serve whiskey to the Americans in bars so smoky that my eyes burn. Pregnant women dance in techno clubs with four hundred people smoking and no air circulation. It's strange that such a seemingly obvious health hazard is snubbed in the face of having a good time, or maybe just daily life. But, as they say, ...c'est la vie.

Children in Paris are very well behaved, acting much like we all imagine our children will. They don't throw temper tantrums, talk incessantly, or even have regular meltdowns. They play on cobblestone streets of the market while their parents, without paying close attention, shop for foodstuffs. They sit patiently and quietly while their parents go about their daily routines. I was amazed at their ability to stay calm and maintain such happy attitudes for extended periods of time, and I was beginning to think they were all sedated due to the fact that in two weeks I had yet to hear a baby or infant cry. Then, finally I heard a burst of spontaneous disagreement. "Yes, they do cry after all!" But, much to my dismay and further disbelief, the crying toddler had had his foot stepped on by a carefree fast-walking American tourist...