

# VIRTUOSO

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Stolen moments at Sicily's Riserva dello Zingaro. Photography by Lucy Laucht.

# THE SOUL OF THE CITY



IN PARIS, WANDERING IS A RITE OF PASSAGE.

BY LINDSEY TRAMUTA PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOANN PAI

Moments worth savoring, clockwise from top left: Carette's framboise sundae, Shakespeare and Company bookstore, breakfast at Cravan, and Boot Café in Le Marais.



# WE CAN TRACE A MYRIAD OF CULTURAL INNOVATIONS TO PARIS,

but perhaps one of the most uniquely French is the flâneur. From the verb *flâner* (to stroll), the term describes an aimless wanderer par excellence, a passionate observer of urban life. First identified and then popularized by Charles Baudelaire in his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” the flâneur is a figure (historically male, but complemented today by the flâneuse) of leisure and privilege, blessed with abundant free time and limited responsibilities.

I wouldn't say I'm a person of excess privilege or time, but when I moved to Paris 16 years ago, I instantly latched onto the concept as a means of understanding the city and how it functioned. I never leave home without my metro pass, yet nothing anchors me here quite like my own two feet. Perhaps that's because I grew up like most Americans, driving from one place to another – to get coffee, to buy groceries, and, perhaps most paradoxically, to exercise. The novelty of walking without direction, meditation in motion, amid the crowds and yet separate from them, lent me a sense of rootedness when I was a new resident.

Buoyed by the city's rhythm, I felt like I could become part of something – a well-choreographed ballet in some arrondissements, a more chaotic dance in others. After all these years, that hasn't changed. The city's natural rumbles make up the soundtrack to my forward movement. *Un pas après l'autre*. I'm a character in my own film, suspended somewhere between real life and fantasy, amid the tree-lined paths of the Palais Royal's garden in one moment, the winding, hilltop streets of Belleville in another.

The aimless wander, as one can only exercise with such life-affirming reverie in Paris and *maybe* a few other cities, is as much about connection to time and place as it is about the freedom of movement. A visitor, should they be able to free themselves from the tourist's checklist, will benefit amply: Paris reveals its gifts most to those who embrace the present.

So slow down as you cross the Pont Neuf, pausing at its perfect midpoint, standing in rapt observation as locals shuffle along the riverbanks. Amble nimbly through Saint-Germain, peering into shop windows, while keeping your phone tucked away. Make your way up the Canal Saint-Martin, catching snippets of conversation as you pass by diners on café terraces.

It's said that the best way to get to know a place is to wander, but doing so can be just as illuminating for your sense of self. If ever there was a place to give it a go, it's in Baudelaire's wonderland of *flânerie*, which lives on, 160 years later.

The obligatory photo op on the Pont de Bir-Hakeim and (opposite) prime people-watching in Saint-Germain.



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