

# Paris for less



**“The City of Lights” shines bright even on a budget—and frugal meets fun with an all-access Paris-Pass to culture, attractions and the Métro. BY JUDITH EVANS THOMAS**

**A**lthough 2009 is turning out to be a “budget” year for my family, there are still basic necessities that must be taken care of and nurtured. At the top of my list are family, friends, food and Paris. The first three may seem obvious, but without the joie de vivre travel brings, my life becomes painfully dull.

I recently set out to prove I could have just as much fun without stressing my credit line and recalled last summer when my family and I traveled to Nantucket Island through Vacation Rental by Owner (vrbo.com). We had a great experience renting a house. I wondered if the company also might have rentals in Paris. As it turned out, it is one of many companies offering apartment rentals in “The City of Lights.”

Arrondissement (location) and apartment size dictate price. A one-bedroom apartment close to the Champs-Élysées (8th Arrondissement) might rent for \$1,400/week, whereas the same size unit in Montparnasse (14th Arrondissement) might be available for as little as \$800/week. An apartment with no air conditioning will be less expensive than one that has it. Likewise, a walk-up will be less than an apartment with a lift.

I chose a one-bedroom on the Left Bank Rue du Dragon (6th Arrondissement) that had a nice eat-in kitchen and windows facing the street. Because it was a walk-up, I negotiated a price of \$900 for the week. My budget allowed me one sit-down meal at a nice restaurant per day. Who wants to pay \$50 for breakfast anyway? That

savings alone added up to \$350.

My apartment was close to Le Bon Marché department store with its basement gourmet market, Le Grand Épicerie, so I loaded up on luscious French cheeses, pâté, wine and fruit. For bread selections, Le Boule Miche Boulangerie/Pâtisserie was just across the street. This boulangerie (a French bakery specializing in breads and pastry) opened its doors at 7 a.m., and by 8 a.m. there was always a line. A shot of French espresso and a buttery, flakey croissant that cost about \$1 became my morning ritual.

On days when my budget wouldn't allow for a sit-down lunch, I would buy a ham-and-cheese stuffed baguette sandwich that cost about \$6 or \$7. I rarely finished all of it and would enjoy what was left with a glass of wine when I got home from wandering the city.

wandered the neighborhood and stopped in at places that were bustling with activity and camaraderie. At most restaurants the chef came out to sit down and chat with his regulars. One restaurant we stumbled into was such a neighborhood staple that we were seated at a communal table. I've never had a better meal or made more friends while massacring another language.

During the day Scott trotted us up and down ancient streets: Via Baccina, Via del Boschetto, Via Panisperna, Via dei Serpenti, Via del Babuino and Via dei Coronari. If I had been there without Scott, I would have wandered into most of the antiques shops and thought "crowded and confusing." Scott quickly sifted through the clutter and found the hidden gems. Marina ended up with a beautiful collection of lamps, collectibles, seating and even a chandelier designed on the island of Murano.

I can't wait to see everything installed in her new home. I also can't wait to go back to Rome. Steve will be psyched, and we will happily be able to put one disagreement behind us. Now about those Louboutin heels. **PM**

#### **WHEN IN ROME**

##### **General Information:**

**Rome Travel Office:** [romaturismo.it](http://romaturismo.it)

**Time Out City Guide:**

[timeout.com/rome](http://timeout.com/rome)

**Italian City Maps:** [mappe.virgilio.it](http://mappe.virgilio.it)

**Newspapers:**

[onlinenewspapers.com](http://onlinenewspapers.com)

**The Vatican:** [vatican.va/](http://vatican.va/)

**Wanted in Rome English Magazine:**

[wantedinrome.com](http://wantedinrome.com)

**Italian Wine Guide:** [gamberorosso.it](http://gamberorosso.it)

**Tickets for Cultural Events:**

[ticketeria.it](http://ticketeria.it)

**Pass for Colosseum and**

**Roman Forum:**

[selectitaly.com/museums.php](http://selectitaly.com/museums.php)

**Art Consultant: Scott A. Barnes:**

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**Monti Section of Rome:** The area stretching from the Colosseum to San Giovanni in Laterano is called Monti because it includes three (Viminale, Esquilino and Quirinale) of the seven hills of Rome. Once a down-and-out home to criminals and prostitutes, it is now a vibrant family residential area. At night you can see the Colosseum lit up from the top of Via Serpetti.

**For more on Judith Evans Thomas' excursion, visit**

**[pittsburghmagazine.com](http://pittsburghmagazine.com).**