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Europe

How to rent an apartment in Paris

- **By Sarah Nicholson**
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Get an Eiffel ... experience the real Paris by living like a local. Picture: Getty Images

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THE first time I went to Paris I stayed in a hotel.

It was a lovely place, quaint and comfortable, on the corner of Rue Vaneau and Rue De Sevres a kilometre past the Musee d'Orsay.

There was a metro stop down the street, a mini-mart across the road, a patisserie around the corner and a bottle shop next door.

But it was a hotel and when we wanted to buy a feast of cheese, pate and fresh baguettes we had to

sip our wine from plastic cups, cut the cheese on a magazine cover, and chill our Perrier on the outside window ledge.

So when my family decided to return to Paris last November we knew we wanted to stay in an apartment. But finding a suitable property, and a company I was happy doing business with over the internet was, initially, easier said than done.

I eventually found **Paris Perfect** (<http://www.parisperfect.com/>) and, after reading online reviews written by other travellers, and emailing owner Madelyn Willems, I knew I was on to a good thing.

Several emails later, to make sure I found a property that suited my family's needs, an initial deposit and the final balance were paid and we had secured Chambertin on Rue Emile Deschanel only a few steps from the Champs de Mars.

Here, in the heart of Paris' chic 7th Arrondissement, we had a private garden as well as an immense living area, dining room, bathroom with laundry, kitchen and three bedrooms.

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The advantage of renting an apartment

For the next week we lived like Parisians. We called at the boulangerie around the corner to buy fresh croissants in the morning, and still-warm baguettes in the evening, and always made it home in time to pick up some creamy pastries at the patisserie next door.

It's exactly this, this local experience, which Willems says is the biggest advantage of renting an apartment.

"This can save you a lot of money," she says.

"When you're in a hotel you have to eat out three times a day but when you have an apartment, with a kitchen, you can make the most of the wonderful food shops we have in Paris and eat at home."

Willems, who is an American, and her French husband, Philippe, started Paris Perfect 10 years ago when they married and moved to London.

Their apartment in Paris was empty for weeks at a time and friends from around the world were asking to rent it when they were visiting The City of Lights.

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Most companies are reputable

Today Paris Perfect looks after 40 holiday rentals and does business through its website.

Willems is aware that some travellers are hesitant about making reservations online, and offers tips to help those who want to use the internet to make a booking and avoid getting stung.

"Most companies are reputable, and the exceptions are extremely rare," she says.

"One thing to look for is a phone number on the website, and call them, or ask them to call you back," she says.

"You also want to make sure you can read some guest reviews, and the reviews should have email addresses. We insist on printing email addresses or asking guests to post reviews themselves."

Paris Perfect isn't the only agency renting apartments in the French capital and if you would like to deal with an Australian company then Melbourne's **Valeria Lloyd Smith** (<http://www.globalbookingsonline.com>) has a range of properties in the city.

RENTING HOW-TO GUIDE

Websites

Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree Forum** (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/index.jspa>) is "the place where the Lonely Planet travel community gets together to exchange travel information, advice and hints".

Slow Travel (<http://www.slowtrav.com>) is a website dedicated to helping travellers become part of the communities they're visiting. It's all about "immersing yourself in the local culture" by staying in an apartment or house a holiday rental rather than a hotel.

Picking a neighbourhood

For those who don't know Paris and the system of arrondissements, Willems says single digits are better than double digits when comes to arrondissements which spiral out from the neighbourhood around the Musee du Louvre.

"The arrondissements are like a snail, they go in a circle, and the 6th and 7th are the most sought-after, but there are other good ones.

"High double digits are not good for tourists, because you want to be within walking distance of the monuments and museums, the shops and cafes all the places the French like to go."

A question of cost

Willems says that when it comes to money, there's something for everyone in Paris. Paris Perfect has studios in low season from 805 euros (about \$A1400) and two-bedroom apartments in low season from 1666 euros (about \$A2900) a week.

"And, with us, that price includes everything: taxes, internet, phone, linen, air-conditioning," she says.

"Australians are lucky because they have their summer holidays when it's the off-season for the rest of the world, so can stay in Paris for cheaper low-season rates."

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