

A stylized illustration of the Eiffel Tower in Paris at sunset. The tower is the central focus, with its intricate lattice structure clearly visible. To its right, a row of Parisian apartment buildings with blue roofs and many windows is shown. In the foreground, a stone bridge with multiple arches spans a body of water, likely the Seine. The water reflects the warm colors of the sky and the silhouettes of the buildings and tower. Several small figures of people are walking along the promenade on the right side of the bridge. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, oranges, and blues, with a few wispy clouds. The overall style is that of a modern, artistic poster or book cover.

PRIME TRAVELER

Paris, Bonjour First

The one word that changes every interaction in this city, the
arrondissement spiral, and the etiquette that separates a
tourist from someone who belongs.

PRIME TRAVELER · INSIDER TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE

CONTENTS

- 01** Bonjour First

- 02** Getting Oriented: The Arrondissement Spiral

- 03** Café and Bistro Etiquette

- 04** The Louvre and the Orsay, Without Losing a Day

- 05** The Tourist Trap Pattern Near Landmarks

- 06** The Metro, Used Correctly

- 07** Neighborhoods Beyond the Postcard

- 08** The Tells That Peg You As a Tourist

- 09** Quick Reference Cheat Sheet

Bonjour First

If you take exactly one thing from this entire guide, take this. Say "bonjour" before you say anything else, ask any question, or make any request, to anyone: a shopkeeper, a waiter, a stranger you're asking for directions. This single word is the actual root of the "rude Parisians" reputation most American visitors arrive already believing, and it's completely within your control to avoid.

Why This Matters So Much Here

Walking up to a counter and immediately asking for something, without a greeting first, reads in Paris the way it would read at home if a stranger walked up to you and barked a demand with no hello. It's not that Parisians are unusually sensitive. It's that skipping the greeting genuinely is a small rudeness by local standards, and the reaction you get afterward is a direct, proportional response to that, not an unprovoked cold shoulder.

Visitors who think Parisians are rude to them are almost always visitors who skipped one word. Say it, and the entire interaction changes.

It Works Almost Everywhere

Entering a shop, sitting down at a café, approaching a museum desk, asking someone on the street for directions. Lead with "bonjour" every time, wait a beat, then continue. It costs you nothing and it is, genuinely, the single highest-leverage phrase in this entire guide.

Leaving Works the Same Way

Saying "au revoir" on your way out of a shop, even one you didn't buy anything from, is expected and noticed. Skipping it on the way in and out is a small, avoidable signal that you were never taught the actual local rhythm of a polite exchange.

Getting Oriented: The Arrondissement Spiral

Paris is divided into twenty numbered districts, called arrondissements, arranged in a genuinely unusual pattern that trips up first-time visitors trying to read a map.

A Spiral, Not a Grid

The districts spiral outward clockwise from the 1st, centered on the Louvre, like a snail shell, which is exactly the nickname locals use for the shape. Once you see it as a spiral rather than trying to memorize twenty individual zones, the whole layout clicks into place.