



Europe Beyond Your Means: The Paris Edition

Conrad Lucas II

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Its authors bill *Europe Beyond Your Means: The Paris Edition* as the antithesis of the standard travel guide, which typically suggests that a trip should be “brief, cursory, and cheap.” Conrad Lucas II and William D. Norgard advise readers to stay for at least one season, so that they will always be able to say, “when I lived in Paris.” They also recommend that readers stick to activities that they would normally do when at home and to dress in style and live with flair. Their startlingly counterintuitive advice includes hitting all of the big tourist attractions—the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, for example—in a day in order to save time for important activities such as locating a neighborhood bar.

An early chapter is devoted to finessing the financing for one’s trip. The authors suggest fudging one’s annual income on credit card applications to increase the spending limit, studying anything as a way to take out a low-interest student loan, asking parents for money, or, as a last resort, saving up for the trip.

Lucas and Norgard believe that image is everything when traveling in a style “beyond your means.” Their what-not-to-pack list includes white sneakers, calf-high athletic socks, gym shorts without pockets, inappropriate T-shirts, hiking apparel, and fanny packs. Fit in, they advise. Dress and act like a French person. Protest something. Limit smiling. Make a cup of coffee last forever. When engaging the locals, be sure to compliment at least one aspect of the French culture in every conversation. And avoid committing a faux pas by saying something like, “So I hear you people are rude.”

The great appeal of this title is that it suggests that the reader will be given pointers on how to enjoy an affordable, luxurious vacation in Paris. One expects useful insider tidbits on living the high life. And there are some, but they are largely limited to bar hopping and club crashing. For example, the authors suggest pretending to be the representative of a celebrity in order to gain access to popular spots. They also comment on good manners: If invited to a Parisian’s home for dinner, don’t try to save money by bringing the cheap chrysanthemums. They are reserved exclusively for cemeteries, “so bringing them to dinner would be like bringing Jell-O shooters to an AA meeting,” write the authors.

While standard travel guides try to excel at aiding the harried traveler with comprehensive detail and well-organized content, *Europe Beyond Your Means: The Paris Edition* is long on attitude and short on fact. In fact, its coverage is spotty at best. It lists only four restaurants and the only chart in the book outlines a pub crawl. The authors’ writing style is erudite and charming, but their content is uneven, even random and skewed toward a demographic too young to enjoy its style. It disappoints mainly because the title raises expectations that go unfulfilled. If a traveler is planning to buy only one guidebook for Paris, this isn’t it. If, however, one prefers a dilettante’s approach to travel, *Europe Beyond Your Means* may appeal. And if an amusing armchair introduction to Paris is desired, give it a try.

MARILYN BERRY (February 13, 2012)

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