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Great Escapes // Paris and Other Flea Market Destinations

From fine antiques for the design set to frivolous and fun secondhand items for everyone, Paris' flea markets are sure to yield special, one-of-a-kind souvenirs. By Shawn Gilliam

Flea markets first made their mark in Paris centuries ago, when peddlers sold peasants flea-infested clothes and castoffs from the wealthy at bargain prices. **Marché aux Puces de St-Ouen** (commonly known as Les Puces, or "The Fleas"), now ranks as the city's oldest—and the world's largest. With 52 acres and more than 2,000 dealers, its stalls and shops overflow with art, furniture, vintage clothes and bric-a-brac of every imaginable sort. As many as 180,000 visitors flock here every week.

Fourteen markets, each with its own personality, come together at Les Puces. **Marché Serpette** gets props from dealers and designers for its exceptionally high-quality antiques—the best at the market. **Marché Paul-Bert** scores high on charm thanks to the beautiful interiors of its shops. But the oldest and largest is **Marché Vernaison**, where a maze of winding lanes leads to the goods. Discover nostalgic pieces of childhood at **Tombées du Camion** ("Fallen from the Truck"), where young antiques dealer Charles Mas fills bins to the brim with toys and carnival trinkets. His

- 1 Eclectic treasures at Les Puces
- 2 Marché Dauphine
- 3 Linens at Janine Giovannoni, Marché Vernaison
- 4 Shopping at Monica Fripes
- 5 Marché Dauphine
- 6 Relaxing at Maison Beys, rue des Rosiers



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Check out the Giraud Art Deco shop at 91 rue des Rosiers for jewelry, clothes, mirrors and more.



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PHOTOS: UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, OWEN FRANKEN; 4, GIRAUD ART DECO; 8&10, BRIGIT HERGERT; SCOUTING BY JENNIFER CASTOLDI.



Marché Paul-Bert

Marché Serpette

Marché Vernaison

Marché Dauphine

Boulevard Peripherique

PARIS

displays alone are worth the visit, although it's hard to resist picking up a small piece to take home. At **Nini Peau d'Chien**, check out miscellany such as apothecary jars, wooden toys and cast-metal Eiffel Towers. More soothing is the namesake shop of owner **Janine Giovannoni** and its soft French linens, including bedding suitable for French royalty displayed neatly atop a marble-topped table. Perhaps the most intriguing niche shop is **Les Porte-Clés** and its very specific merchandise—key chains from the 1960s. Find hundreds of examples representing an amazing diversity of topics, from banks and bourbon manufacturers to petroleum companies and political campaigns. Across the street

from **Marché Vernaison** at **Marché Dauphine** (the newest of Les Puces, with an elegant, gallerylike hall), you'll spot **Monica Fripes—Desguisements**, where vintage dresses, blouses, men's suits, shoes and accessories from princes of 1950s and '60s fashion Pierre Cardin, Guy Laroche and Yves Saint-Laurent mingle among lesser-known vintage labels. Nearby and not to be missed is **L'Armada**, with its collection of finds from seafaring vessels. Antique lights, barometers, scuba gear and globes mix with scientific objects and other curiosities. And don't overlook storefront **SARL Giraud Art Deco** at rue des Rosiers 91, where *The Great Gatsby* is alive and well with early 20th-century bar carts, mirrored vanities and lamps.

Note that the quoted price isn't the one you're expected to pay; vendors assume you'll bargain. Plan to land on a discount of about 10



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Actress **Catherine Deneuve** and designer **Vicente Wolf** are among the shoppers known to frequent **Marché aux Puces de St-Ouen**.



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- 7 Marché Paul-Bert
- 8 Monica Fripes at her vintage clothing store.
- 9 Marché Dauphine
- 10 Monica Fripes, Marché Dauphine
- 11 Les Portes-Clés, Marché Vernaison
- 12 High-quality antiques at Marché Serpette

percent in most cases. The best deals often come late in the day, but for the best picks and lightest crowds, come early. Open at 7 a.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays; many vendors shutter their doors for holiday the first two weeks in August.

Other flea markets of note: The **Marché de la Porte de Vanves** on the southern edge of Paris is considerably smaller, but known to have better deals than Les Puces. Open on weekends, it's generally best to come on Sunday, because dealers are out combing estate sales and antiques fairs in the countryside on Saturdays. More adventurous and gritty is the **Marché aux Puces de Montreuil** on the east side of the city. Although much of the merchandise is junk, the prices are low, the treasure hunting fun and the atmosphere a fascinating display of the city's diversity.

Getting there: On the northern edge of Paris, Les Puces is a 10- to 15-minute walk from the Metro line 4 stop Porte de Clignancourt. After passing through a rather bleak area and under an elevated freeway, turn left onto rue des Rosiers.

Where to stay: On rue La Fayette in the 9th Arrondissement, **Hotel Jules** (doubles from \$245) is the newest jewel in the design-hotel collection of Paris hotelier Grace Leo. The chic rooms were inspired by 1950s, '60s and '70s style.

Where to eat: **Chez Louise** at Marché Vernaison in Les Puces offers good local fare and is always full of Parisians. **Café Le Paul Bert** at Marché Paul-Bert is known for its excellent onion soup, but it's also a pleasant stop for a café crème.