

OVERSEAS

## Who wants to live in Paris anymore?

Some think the City of Lights has lost its soul, but property prices are still booming



Paris is a densely populated city at more than 20,000 people per square kilometre  
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Emanuele Midolo | Sunday November 21 2021, 12:01am GMT, The Sunday Times

“I always marvel at its beauty, but I deplore an apathy and even a certain ‘uglification’. Paris has become a rubbish bin . . . Where has the City of Lights gone?”

So said Stéphane Bern, President Macron’s culture guru, in a French [newspaper report](#) this week. For some it is telling that the man tasked by Macron with saving France’s heritage is leaving the city where he has lived for the past 50 years to live in the countryside.

After the Bataclan attack of 2015 and the pandemic, has Paris lost its soul? What is it like to live in the French capital today? Is there space for Brits who still consider themselves Europeans?

*“C’est de la politique,”* says Hugues de la Morandière, a born-and-bred Parisian and the founder of the local estate agency Varenne, with a shrug. “The right is slamming [the socialist mayor] Anne Hidalgo for being the mayor of greenies and the bobos [bourgeois bohemians]. But that’s not necessarily an objective view.”



A four-bedroom flat near Rue de Buci is available for £3.4million through Savills

He says that people have been debating for centuries about Paris changing and evolving. Today the topics are dog poo, cycle lanes and e-scooters. In the 19th century it was the widening and straightening of the city’s streets to improve hygiene — and avoid barricades.

“Whether it’s right or wrong depends on your perception of the city,” de la Morandière says. “Another big debate is about how the city is going to grow: horizontally or vertically.”

That debate intensified after it was revealed that work on the so-called [Tour Triangle](#), which has been described as Paris's response to the Shard in London, will begin this year.

The €700 million, 180m skyscraper in the southwest of the city is reportedly opposed “by all the residents” of the 15th arrondissement, in which it will stand.

This is not the first time Parisians have rebelled against a tower. Many considered the Eiffel Tower an eyesore when it was completed in 1889 and the 1970s Tour Montparnasse, on the left bank, does not have many fans. The controversy was so intense that a couple of years after the opening of the 210m black skyscraper the city banned construction of buildings taller than seven storeys — a ban broken by the new development. “The Triangle bothers me less than the Tour Montparnasse,” says de la Morandière. “The shape of the tower could help relieve the density and provide outdoor space to most of the flats.”

Paris is a densely populated city at more than 20,000 people per square kilometre, which some argue is why it appears dirtier than other European capitals. This year the hashtag “*saccage Paris*” (trash Paris) went viral on Twitter, but officials dismissed it as a smear campaign organised by the right. Bern's words this week reignited the debate.

“The city is exemplary from an architectural point of view, but it's true that we can do better when it comes to how clean it is,” de la Morandière says. Even Bern conceded that it was not the mayor's fault that Parisians litter the streets. “She can't put an ashtray and a bin behind every inhabitant, she doesn't deserve all the attacks she's received,” Bern told *Le Parisien*.

Bern is moving because the countryside makes him “happier”. He is not alone. The French property portal SeLoger says one home hunter in four is planning to move



away from the Île de France region that includes Paris, with Corsica, Brittany and Provence the top three destinations of choice.

However, SeLoger's media director, Séverine Amate, says it is not an exodus. "The Île de France is losing a number of residents, but the region is still the top place homebuyers search for, accounting for one search in three nationwide."

This is reflected in the house prices. After a slight dip during the pandemic, prices in Paris have risen more than 7 per cent in the past year, according to SeLoger, compared with 2.8 per cent in London. Of the 20 arrondissements in Paris, 17 have reached the threshold of £10,000 a square metre, which means a 100 sq m two-bedroom apartment in the city centre would cost about £1.1 million. The 7th arrondissement, home to the Eiffel Tower and Musée d'Orsay, has become the most expensive district, surpassing the residential 16th close to the Bois de Boulogne.



A two-bedroom flat in the Latin Quarter is available for £2.1 million through Savills

While some Parisians are leaving, other French citizens are returning, including many who have been living in the UK — pushed by a combination of Brexit and post-Covid travel restrictions and pulled by the change of president and family ties in their home country.

“Many wealthy people had left Paris under François Hollande; they have come back under Emmanuel Macron,” confirms Roddy Aris, an associate partner at Knight Frank.

He adds that Paris is “a net beneficiary” of Brexit. “There’s still a market of British people who are fuming about Brexit, rightly so. They feel European and they still want to be part of it.”

Mia Sharp from Northamptonshire works for the Fondation L’Oréal and is doing a master’s in media and communication at Sciences Po, the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Sharp, 25, moved to the buzzy Belleville neighbourhood in the 20th arrondissement just before the pandemic to do an internship. She has decided to stay on.

“It’s a cliché to say it, but it’s so beautiful,” she says. “Sometimes you are annoyed because it’s clogged with tourists or there’s dog poo on the pavements, but then you look up and you feel so lucky to live here.”

She agrees that litter can be an issue but argues that for a city that is so busy it could be much worse. “The binmen come around multiple times a day. I wish we had recycling bins on the streets, though.”

Sharp’s boyfriend, who moved to Paris in December, was shocked by the amount of dog mess on the street. “Expats love complaining about stuff,” she says. “You don’t want everything to be perfect like the creepy little town in *Shrek*. People can’t expect perfection.”

Like *Emily in Paris*, the hit Netflix TV show (which returns for a second season next month?)

“I was cringing so much that she also has a master’s in communications,” Sharp says with a laugh. “I also loved that French people were trashing it, but I was always hearing whispers at the cafés, ‘*T’as vu Emily in Paris?*’, pronounced Pa-ree, of course.”

Sharp and her boyfriend have no plans to leave and have obtained French residency, which they describe as “the one bureaucratic process that was very speedy”.

“Covid was a very sad time for Paris,” Sharp says. “You felt for the city. Everything that makes Paris buzzy, like the terraces, was shut. Paris is a city that you enjoy the most when you are outside, not stuck in your tiny flat. When that space is taken away from you it feels desolate.”