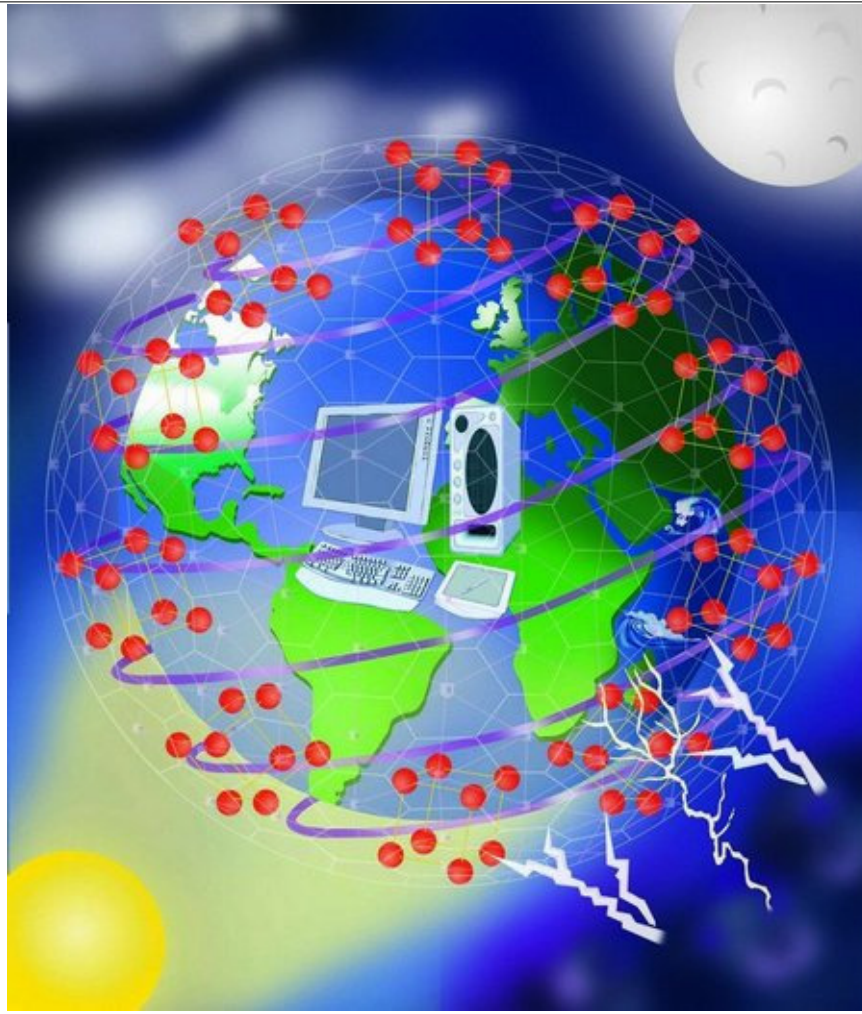


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Travel! It offers so much. – The lure of fascinating places, exotic cultures and maybe, even the possibility of romance. Traveling the world is something that everybody intends to do but the reality is most people stay pretty close to home. For us, living in the Okanagan, that's not necessarily much of a hardship; our home is a world-renowned travel destination. Be that as it may, let's take a little mind excursion to a place that is endlessly fascinating, comfortably exotic and very, very romantic – *the city of light*, **Paris!**

The purpose of this adventure is to see how much planning and information gathering you can do for yourself with the aid of the handy-dandy Internet. And no, this is not an article about how to circumvent your local travel agency. Licensed agents have operated

in the travel business for donkey's years and they are the experts in getting you to your destination in the most timely and comfortable manner. So, if you're looking for cheap flights on the Net, start surfing now, Pal, 'cause you're on your own. This commentary is about enhancing your travel experience by gleaning knowledge pertinent to you from that black hole of information, otherwise known as the World Wide Web.

So, we're going to go to Paris! Take it on faith that airfare and hotel accommodation will be taken care of on this side of the pond with the assistance of that local travel agent. Now, what else would you want to know about your destination before buckling up on the plane? Well, you might want to get to know the town better.

Known as the "city with a hundred villages," Paris is divided in 20 districts – called "*arrondissements*." Since it is impossible to define where the 'real' Paris actually is, the best thing to do is to choose your destination according to what you'll want to do and what ambiance you want to experience during your trip. That means you have to some knowledge about where you'll be landing. What airport would serve you best?

If you've landed at **Charles de Gaulle Roissy Airport**, you would be in the northeast sector of Paris, placing you closer to hotels on the Right Bank. But if you arrive at **Orly Airport**, you're in the southeast quadrant and Left Bank hotels would be more convenient to access. As it happens, hotels are more expensive on the Right Bank – the Champs Elysees, the Opera, and the Louvre – than on the Left Bank – Saint Germain, the Latin Quarter, and Invalides, which is home to the Eiffel Tower.

Rooms on the Left Bank are typically smaller, but by Canadian standards, all hotel rooms in Paris are on the diminutive side. However, among European capitals, Paris is among the most affordable. Still, the closer you are to the centre of the city, the more expensive the hotels will be.

During the peak travel season, and especially if you arrive in Paris in the early morning, you might have to wait to check in at your hotel. In France, the usual check out time is 12:00 noon, and it takes a little time to get your room ready. However, a good ploy to get things moving faster is to politely mention to the receptionist at the front desk how tired you feel. Following that, your room should be ready shortly. ...But remember, you're in Paris! If you have enough energy to stay awake a few hours longer, then leave your luggage at the hotel, and head for a near-by *Café* or *Brasserie*. You can start your first day in Paris with a true continental breakfast before turning in for a good day's sleep.

Getting around the city of light is a good deal easier than you might imagine. The Paris subway is exceptionally fast and clean, and it may become your preferred means of transport. All hotels in the centre of the city are within walking distance to a subway station. However, if you are truly adventurous, try a French cab ride. Going to Paris and not experiencing a cab ride would be like going to Disney World and not taking in Splash Mountain. – The experiences are said to be similar!

Naturally, you'll want to take in all the famous sights like the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre but there's plenty more to see in a city that's over a thousand years old! – At least, I think there should be. – The truth is, I have never been to Paris – Ontario, Texas, or France. The closest I have ever been to the land of the Gauls is Swansea, Wales. – Not all that far as the seagull flies, but certainly too far to swim. Okay, so where did I get all this cozy inside information about gay Paree? – You guessed it, from the Internet!

I went to my favorite search engine, GOOGLE and keyed in some search words. In this case, they were: "Travel+Information+Paris". The result was ten pages, each containing twelve sites related to the city of Paris. On these sites, in addition to all the information I've already fed you, I learned about French public holidays; how to retrieve lost property; how to convert dollars to francs; how to make a phone call and rent a car. I even know that French appliances run on 220 current and would fry our wimpy 110 units, so hair dryers and curling irons might as well be left at home.

On the **Paris Pages**, which I found at www.paris.org, they offered information about the city, its culture as well as tourist information. A little further down the page, **French Tourism**, www.francetourism.com, offered practical information like: where to go, what to do and where to stay when traveling in France. And, **The Paris In Sites Newsletter**, www.parisinsites.com, offered travel and transportation tips, information about French cuisine, as well as articles written by recent travelers. I never bothered to go past the first page, so that means 108 relevant sites went unvisited in my quest for detailed information about Paris.

The point is this: in reality, the destination doesn't matter at all. Whether it's Istanbul, Paris, Malibu or Vancouver, all the information about the place you want to visit is literally at your fingertips. The World Wide Web is the modern day equivalent of the Library at Alexandria, only better. With the Web, everyone has access to it. So, surf's up on the information highway. Kowabunga and hang ten!

The Arrondissements of Paris

