



FAMILY LIFE IN PARIS

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I often am asked what it is like to bring children up in Paris and what I like and don't like about it, so I thought it could be fun to write down some of my experiences! These are just random things that I have personally observed..

Playgrounds and Parks: There are not many and there is especially not a lot of green grass for the kids to play on. Most neighbourhood parks are small and consist of flowerbeds, a play structure with benches around it and no swings! Kids go play and the parents sit on the sidelines reading books. The Parisians are definitely not helicopter parents - children entertain themselves or play with their friends. It's nice as the kids are really independent, but it is not so nice when they start throwing sand at each other's faces and there are no grown-ups to intervene.

Schools: I do find the the school system of a country defines the country a lot. Like most French school children, my children go to the local French school around the corner. The standard of education is high, and the children are challenged and marked at a very young age (the word evaluation is used a lot). Interestingly this is not only something that the teachers impose on the children, but something that is actually being asked for by a lot of the parents. For example, teachers are not really supposed to give the children homework, but it is apparently often the parents who insist they do! Schools are also not a place for the whole family to socialise, but only the children. Parents drop their children off in the morning and rush off to work. At the end of the day, we pick up the children at the school gate, but there is not a lot of chatting going on... (My personal theory is that there is a belief in France that the education of children is responsibility of the state, not of the parents, so schools are not a place for parents to get involved). I might be wrong, but I do have the feeling that there are a lot more full-time working mothers in Paris than in other big European cities I know. This might also be the reason why there is less involvement from the family in school life.

Restaurants: Though it has improved a lot, Parisian restaurants do not cater toward children. Children are welcome though, as long as they tow the line and sit down and eat. Maybe I am mistaken, but not that many of my French friends take their kids out to eat. People cook a lot and have people over for dinner, even in the tiniest apartments.

Apéro: One of the favourite things to do over here is to have people over for apero (short for aperitif) which are pre-dinner drinks. My children have even been invited over by their friends over for an apero instead of a playdate! Usually there will be champagne or wine, beer, sparkling water and **Champony** (a sparkling apple juice in a champagne bottle) for the kids. Foodwise often you serve paté, foie gras and some good saucisson. It's the perfect event to have with kids and parents, it starts relatively early and you are not required to serve real food for everyone.

Food Shopping: Parisians still go to the market on a Saturday or Sunday and buy their meat at the butchers, their bread at the bakers, their cheese at the cheese shop and their vegetables at the green grocers - it is one of the things I love about this city!

These are are just some personal observations. Other people might have had completely different experiences, which would be lovely to hear by the way!

- Emilie

Above, a photo of Place des Vosges, which is a typical Parisian park, which is beautifully landscaped, but definitely not full of rambling nature...

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