

# I don't hate the French, it's Paris I just can't stand

I hate Paris. I hate it in the springtime, I hate it in the summer, I hate it in the winter, and I hate it in the fall.

Nothing good ever happens to me in Paris. I have always hated it, I hate it still and I will hate it in the future.

The city of love? Spare me. More like the city of despair. The only thing I can ever think of when I see the Pont Neuf is throwing myself into *la Seine*. I have visions of desolate Parisians jumping from the bridge into the murky waters below. In fact, it amazes me there's anyone alive in Paris.

The weather stinks. It always rains. You can never find a cab because it's always raining, and when you do the driver either threatens to kill you (or your mother) or, as you give him the address of your destination, he just drives away in a manner so breath-takingly rude that you are left speechless – and stranded.

Forget Paris. It's full of traffic jams, men picking their noses, overpriced food and far too many tourists. It is the capital of a country that navel-gazes as a national pastime, and philosophises about everything without the ability to do anything but go bankrupt. Not to mention a nation that eulogises infidelity. Great. It's the victim of its own spin.

What's romantic about Paris? It's a city of heartbreak. A place where people openly weep on the street over broken hearts and shattered love affairs. They would steamroll over you before uttering *Excusez-moi*. Strange people get named Paris, which only confirms my point.

Everyone moans about the need to speak French for fear of being gillotined (or at least poked with a knitting needle) if they speak English. What's worse is when you speak French and they respond in English, unable to bear the massacre of their sacred *langue française*. Pronounce one thing wrong and you might as well be speaking Serbo-Croat.



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## LONDON BUZZING

The Parisians do not understand queueing or order. At the Gare du Nord on Friday night I waited in the rush-hour line-up to get a cab, only to be elbowed out of the way by snotty Parisians who would have trampled me to death had I not opted to take *le Metro*.

Then I went to get a ticket, admittedly for the overrated *bateau* that motors down *la Seine* on sightseeing excursions. There was literally one minute to get *les billets* and catch the boat. But guess what? It was *le break-time*. So the girl didn't even bother to look at us and went to smoke her cigarette outside in the rain, with a *hauteur* that goes with a 35-hour work-week.

On the road from Baghdad to Amman two years ago, I travelled back to civilisation with an ex-SAS soldier, who then employed 30 000 people in his company, which provided security. To pass the time on the 10-hour drive we tried to play some games. Then, in a robust, if not stereotypically British fashion, he asked me which nationality I really hated.

I have to admit I couldn't think of any. So I said the Belgians. But I could not tell him why. I like their chocolate, their *frites* and Tintin. He hated the French. I don't even hate the French: it's Paris I hate.

Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart famously said in the movie *Casablanca* that they'd "always have Paris", a reference to a romantic liaison that went bad. Well, they can have it. On top of which, the French probably didn't even invent french fries.

Thank the Belgians for that.