

Paris – Unattractive Quarter Turned to Lively Chinatown

Paris is home to two famous Chinatowns also referred to as Quartier Chinois in French namely 13th arrondissement and Belleville 20 arrondissement. The 13th arrondissement located on the left bank was started in 1970s when Chinese arrived from Vietnam in boats. Others who settled here commonly referred to as the lesser are those Chinese who arrived from other countries including Cambodia, French Caledonia, Mauritius, Laos and French Guiana.



This famous arrondissement had fallen victim to miserable urban development which had begun under the Gaullist administration. The arrondissement was brought down and replaced by unfriendly and unattractive high rise buildings. Parisians found the area very unattractive and none of them wanted to settle in what they referred to as world of concrete. The Chinese who arrived from Vietnam on the other hand found the arrondissement as the Promised Land.

The main reason the Chinese loved the area was that there was plenty of space and rents were cheap. They found an appropriate area to build their own city. In 1982 the first Chinese store was opened.

Currently this southeastern part of France marks the largest Chinatown in the whole Europe and has over 150 restaurants. It borders boulevard Massena, avenue de Choisy and avenue d'Ivry. Most of the area is normally closed on Mondays and very little goes on on this day.

Chinatown 13 arrondissement can be expressed as the combination of different Chinatowns including Vientiane Chinatown, Saigon Chinatown and Luang Prabang Chinatown. No one would have thought that once abandoned universe of concrete would grow to be one of the liveliest neighborhoods in a span of forty years. The Chinatown 13 arrondissement is popular to the locals for the hopping nightlife along the Seine. You can purchase lots of tapestry made by the manufacture des Gobelins that was started in the 15th century. Tourists as well as the locals find a visit to the Bibliotheque Nationale de France Mitterrand memorable.



A walk through this famous Chinatown whisks you from Paris to Shanghai or Hong Kong in seconds. If you are visiting the town for the first time, try sampling the Chinese cuisine in the famous Chinese and Thai restaurants all over the streets. The food is not only delicious but also quite cheap with exceptional service. Among the common dishes served are prawns stir fried, khao nom kroc, lap neua, chilli-spiked salad and Laotian ravioli.

In mid 1980s another Chinatown grew in Belleville, in the northern part of the city. This was the home of Maurice Chevalier and Edith Piaf and immigrants would later settle in this area. However, currently you can find other immigrants including Armenian shoemakers, Jewish tailors, Africans and Arabs. In summer this area is usually like the Cholon which is a Chinese air market.

Within the boundaries of boulevard Massena and avenue de Choisy and avenue d'Ivry numerous Chinese businesses sprouted to serve the needs of the Chinese immigrants in this newly created Chinatown. Stores and supermarkets were stocked with household foodstuff from their homeland Chinese pastries shops also grew in number to offer festive cakes and so did numerous Chinese restaurants that offered Chinese cuisine.



The most popular store in Paris Chinatown is the Tang Freres which is owned by brothers of Laos Chinese origin. This shop is not only popular to the Chinese but to the local Parisians and international tourists as well.

As a result to the way the Paris Chinatown developed there are no characteristically Chinese styled buildings. Nevertheless Chinese traditional institutions such as temples, Chinese schools and martial art school are present only that they are buried under the physical façade.

Paris Chinatown is probably at its best during the famous Chinese New Year. This is a popular event that is usually celebrated by the Chinese and the streets are usually decorated with banners and stores display New Year products outside. The Chinese usher in the New Year in numerous performances

such as fire crackers and Lin dance. The residents with the business community organize a New Year's parade that attracts a lot of tourists.

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