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Pre-Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

A tour under Paris

The great avenues are quiet, the shops are closed. There’s the smell of fresh bread from a bakery somewhere. It would be hard to say which time of the day in Paris I prefer but this is probably it. Soon the streets will be full of people and trafﬁc. As with most other cities, you see the real Paris when the city wakes up.

There is, however, another part of Paris which is silent and free from people 24 hours a day. Under the city are hundreds of kilometres of tunnels. There are sewers and old subways but there are also spaces of all kinds: canals and catacombs, wine cellars which have been made into nightclubs and galleries. During the 19th century, the Parisians needed more stone for buildings above the ground so they dug tunnels beneath the city. After that, many farmers grew mushrooms in them. During World War II, the French Resistance ﬁghters also used them. Since the 1970s, many groups of young people spend days and nights below the city in these tunnels. It’s a place for parties, theatre performances, art galleries – anything goes here!

Everywhere you go under Paris, there is history and legend. Historians and novelists often refer to them in their books. For example, Victor Hugo mentions the tunnels in his famous novel *Les Miserables* and in the story and musical *The Phantom of the Opera* there is a pond beneath the old opera house. Most people think this is myth but in fact there is an underground pond here with ﬁsh. A ‘normal’ tourist can visit parts of Paris beneath the ground. For example, there are the catacombs beneath the Montparnasse district. Here you can see the bones and skeletons of about six millions Parisians. The bodies came from cemeteries above the ground two centuries ago when the city needed more space.

However, it’s illegal to enter other parts of the tunnels and police often search the area. It’s also very dangerous because some of the tunnels might collapse. Nevertheless, there are people who will take you to visit them. I have found two ‘unofﬁcial’ tour guides – Dominique and Yopie (not their real names). They take me through many tunnels and after a couple of hours we arrive at a room which isn’t on any map. Yopie and some of his friends built it. The room is comfortable and clean with a table and chairs and a bed. Yopie tells me there are many other places like this. ‘Many people come down here to party, some people to paint … We do what we want here.’

myth (n) /mɪɵ/ a ﬁctional story

illegal (adj) /ɪˈli:gl/ against the law

collapse (v) /kəˈlaeps/ fall down

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