

We're in Paris, on the *Île de la Cité*, in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame next to the River Seine. This is point zero. The distances from Paris to all parts of France are measured from here. And at the heart of Paris is the Seine. 'For Parisians the Seine is the way to know where you are in Paris,' says the art historian Marina Ferretti.

I love my boat

One day 34 years ago, Claude Tharreau was walking along the Seine looking for an apartment to buy when he saw the *Cathare*: a 70-foot-long boat built in 1902 and for sale. It was Sunday. On Wednesday he bought the boat. 'Afterwards I noticed it was a boat with no electricity or water,' he says. He has lived on it since then. It's one of the 199 houseboats in Paris.

Instant beach

The beach-on-the-Seine was the idea of Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë. Every summer, the road on the Right Bank of the river is closed for four weeks. The project manager Damien Masset lists the ingredients for an instant beach: 5,500 tons of sand, 250 blue umbrellas, 350 deck chairs, 800 chairs, 250 loungers, 200 tables, four ice-cream sellers, eight cafés, 250 people to build the beach and 450 people to work there.

River rules

It's a hot summer day. You can see the heat rising from the road. The river looks cool. 'Can you swim in the Seine?' I ask the head of police Sandrine Berjot. '*Non*,' she says. '38 euros.' That's the fine for swimming. 'What about your feet?' 'No, you can't put your feet in.' Here are some other things you can't do: go waterskiing or tie your boat around a tree with rope. And if you see a person in the water you mustn't jump in. You must call the police. This is serious: the fine for jumping in may be 75,000 euros and five years in jail.

The river

All kinds of objects float in the water: plastic toys, balloons, cigarettes, empty bottles. They float past the famous architecture of Paris and the river changes all the time. The painters Claude Monet and Henri Matisse had studios on the river. In their paintings we can see the changing and dancing light on the river.

Glossary:

houseboat (n) a boat that people live on

deck chair (n) a type of chair that folds. Used outside.

lounger (n) a type of chair you can lie on. Used outside.

Keywords:

cool (adj) a bit cold, but nice

danger (n) if you are *in danger* it is possible that something bad will happen

empty (adj) with nothing inside

fine (n) money you must pay if you break a law or rule

historian (n) someone who knows a lot about history

ingredient (n) a thing you need to make something

painting (n) a picture made with paint

Parisian (n) a person who lives in Paris

studio (n) a place where an artist works

toy (n) a thing you play with