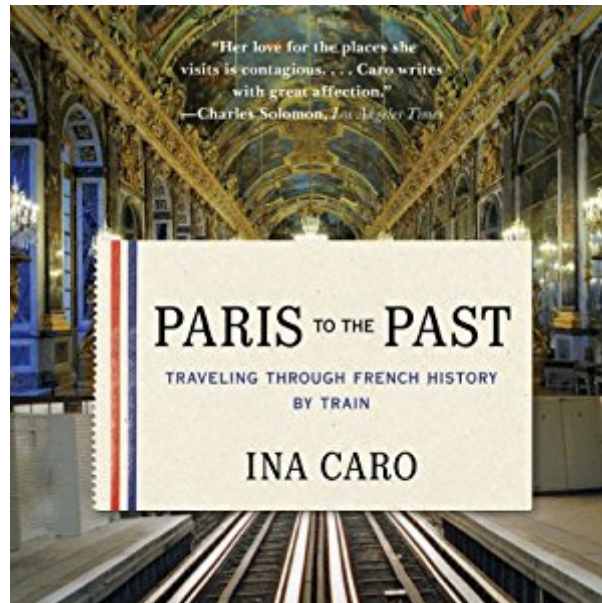


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# Paris To The Past: Traveling Through French History By Train



## Synopsis

In one of the most inventive travel books in years, Ina Caro invites listeners on 25 one-day train trips that depart from Paris and transport us back through 700 years of French history. Whether taking us to Orléans to evoke the visions of Joan of Arc or to the Place de la Concorde to witness the beheading of Marie Antoinette, Caro animates history with her lush descriptions of architectural splendors and tales of court intrigue. "[An] enchanting travelogue" (Publishers Weekly), *Paris to the Past* has become one of the classic guidebooks of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The recipe Ina Caro followed in writing "Paris to the Past: Traveling through French History by Train," was simple, if somewhat arbitrary: write a gist of the history of Paris (and so of the kingdom and empire of France) based on extant landmarks. Or, conversely, write a kind of travel guide to historical Paris arranged chronologically. The landmarks, naturally, must be centered about Paris; the means of transportation to get there (or at least in the general vicinity), by train--to include regional rail and subway, the "Metropolitan." The landmarks, with few exceptions, couldn't be much more than an hour away from Paris. Focus on the history of the places you'll go--the idea being to see the development of France through the art and architecture of the places visited in historical progression--but throw into the mix your personal recollections about your actual travel experiences. The arbitrary elements are clear--travel by train and restrict that travel to about an hour--and not unreasonable. As travel becomes faster and more convenient, one can imagine that

one day all of France could be covered under such a recipe. But it works. The first stop, Saint-Denis, for instance, is a relatively short (20 min) Metro ride to a northern suburb; a later destination, Chartres, an easy one-hour shot from Paris. At first, I thought that the choice of locations seemed peculiarly non-Parisian: relatively few destinations covered in the book are in Paris proper. Quickly, though, I came to appreciate the thinking behind the choices. How often in touring a place do we group our visits by location and so get a smattering of different periods, and so varying ideas and styles, all in one confusing blur?

I happened to see the author, Ina Caro, interviewed by Charlie Rose to promote her book. The only two words in French that she pronounced, "Fontainebleau" and "Carcassonne," she butchered with a heavy American accent. As another reviewer has written, Ms. Caro admits that she doesn't even speak French! There are absurdities in this book: why break her rule about taking only day trips so that she could be back in Paris "in time for dinner" to include a trip to La Rochelle--approximately 250 miles from Paris? What's the point? I live in Paris and have been to La Rochelle numerous times and I can testify that there are plenty of places just as interesting to visit as La Rochelle that are not 250 miles from Paris! Then there's the ch<sup>^</sup>teau of Vaux le Vicomte, which Ms. Caro implies is accessible by train. Wrong. The only way to get there, besides driving, is to take the train to Melun and then pay for a taxi to Vaux le Vicomte and back or board the "Chateaubus" shuttle on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from April through November. Now if you want a useful and practical guide to discovering "the real France" from Paris, I enthusiastically recommend "An Hour from Paris," by the Paris-based English writer Annabel Simms. Her book will not suggest taking the TGV to La Rochelle or going to the chateaux of the Loire for the day, but boarding a train that will take you to such fascinating places as the historic town of Provins [once the third-largest city in France], famous for its roses and its medieval fortifications; or to picturesque Moret-sur-Loing, where the painter Alfred Sisley spent most of his life--all within just one hour from leaving the station. Then you discover these places on foot.

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