

# My summer vacation: Paris public transportation

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20190927-01](https://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20190927-01)

September 27, 2019



Raymond Chen

## What ticket to get?

There are a large number of options for paying for public transportation in the Paris area. I'll limit myself to those of interest to tourists: In order to be considered here, the ticket package must be available to non-residents and include travel in the central Paris area (Zone 1).

Ticket	Validity (days)	Rider types	Zones	Notes
Paris Visite	1, 2, 3, 5, 7	Adult, Child	3, 5	
Mobilis	1	Adult	2, 3, 4, 5	
Navigo Découverte	7	Adult	5	Must begin on Monday.
t+ (pay-by-ride)	1 ride	Adult, Child	1 RER, 5 Metro	Must buy in packs of 10.

The Navigo Découverte is some sort of secret. You have to search really hard to find it. The RATP Web site doesn't list it among the [available travel passes](#). Furthermore, a number of pass options are missing from [the English version of the site](#).

Here's a price chart (as of summer 2019). Tickets that have separate adult/child prices are shown as such. V = Paris Visite, M = Mobilis, D = Navigo Découverte.

Zones	1-day	2-day	3-day	5-day	7-day
2	M: 7.50				
3	V: 12.00 / 6.00 M: 10.00	V: 19.50 / 9.75	V: 26.65 / 13.30	V: 38.35 / 19.15	

4	M: 12.40				
5	V: 25.25 / 12.60 M: 17.80	V: 38.35 / 19.15	V: 53.75 / 26.85	V: 65.80 / 32.90	D: 22.80 (+ 5.00)

The best deal for a week-long visit is usually the Navigo Découverte: A one-week Navigo Découverte 5-zone pass costs less than a one-day Paris Visite 5-zone pass. The catch is that the Navigo Découverte requires that you arrive on Monday. If your trip does not align to the Monday-Sunday validity period of the Navigo Découverte, then you will have to use some other means to get around on the other days. Though if you look at the chart, it seems that if you really need the five-zone coverage, and you will be traveling a lot, you may as well just get another Navigo Découverte. (We arrived on Sunday, so we used t+ tickets on the first day to get to our apartment, and then explored the local area. We bought Navigo Découverte cards the next day.)

(If you don't plan on going outside the central Paris area much, then you may be able to get away with a less expensive ticket and buy pay-per-ride tickets for your out-of-town excursions.)

For the Navigo Découverte pass, you must also pay a one-time €5 charge for the card itself. The card is good for ten years, so if you take another trip to Paris (and really, why wouldn't you?), you can reuse your old card.

Obtaining a Navigo Découverte pass is a bit more of a hassle: You must buy it from the person in the booth at the station. It therefore helps a lot if you can speak French. Fortunately, one of our traveling companions grew up in Paris, so we let him do the talking for us.

You also must do some preparation before you leave home: You need a photo of yourself (slightly smaller than a passport-sized photo) to affix to the card. It doesn't need to be fancy. We used color photos printed on regular paper.

If the schedule works out, and you can deal with the extra hassle, the Navigo Découverte is a winner.

### **The RATP Web site**

The information on the RATP Web site can be confusing. For example, the basic Navigo pass is available only to residents, and it is available in monthly or weekly form, covering either all zones or two adjacent non-central-Paris zones. In the description, it says,

You may use all public transport in the Île-de-France region regardless of the zones specified on your travel pass:

- All weekend long, from Saturday, 12 a.m., through Sunday 11:50 p.m.
- on bank holidays, all day long, from 12 a.m. through 11:59 p.m.
- from 12 a.m. on 15 July through 11:59 p.m. on 15 August
- during short-term school holidays...

Note: zone-free travel is not available for 2-zone Navigo weekly travel passes (zones 2-3, 3-4, and 4-5).

I found the “Note” confusing because if you have an all-zone pass, then the free all-zone travel doesn’t mean anything since you already had free all-zone travel. It seems to be saying “This offer is not available to people who could take advantage of it.”

And then I realized that the exclusion applies only to *weekly* passes; people with monthly two-zone passes can still benefit from it. Still, the wording is really weird, because the free all-zone travel benefit is useful to only one type of pass (two-zone monthly), but they describe it as applying to everybody, with exceptions that reduce it to just one type of pass anyway.

## **Travel notes and experiences**

The summer is when many organizations schedule maintenance work, and the public transportation system is no exception. Due to track closures, we had to board the train for our day trip to Versailles at Javel. Just something to remember if you visit during the summer: You may have to adjust your trip planning to take the closures into account.

RER trains do not necessarily stop at all stations. The RER train system gives each train a four-letter name: The first letter encodes the terminus, and the second letter encodes the stops along the way. (The third and fourth letters are just to make the result pronounceable.) The encoding is complicated and not well-documented on any English-language Web site I could find. For a trip to visit friends in Torcy,<sup>1</sup> we took the RER E line, intending to transfer to the RER A line at Val de Fontenay. I got nervous when the train skipped several stations. We must have taken an express train, but luckily it stopped at Val de Fontenay.

<sup>1</sup> My older daughter played with their older daughter. The only language the two have in common is Cantonese. They both speak it poorly, but it was all they had, so they made it work, with occasional help from a computerized French/English dictionary. (My younger daughter had it easier. Her playmates knew a little English. But the younger kids just played Beyblade, so all she really needed to learn was how to count to three in French.)

Raymond Chen

**Follow**

