

[Table of Contents](#)

North Carolina native, Donna Morris, makes her living helping out folks new to Paris.
© Bestfriendinparis.com

By Barbara Diggs

Travel with a Twist: Becoming a Professional Best Friend in Paris

Wouldn't it be great to have a best friend who lives in Paris? She could take you to the secret cafés and corners that locals love but the guidebooks miss. She could give you tips on dealing with surly French waiters, and boost your confidence as you test your high school French. She'd be someone to call if you get lost. And someone to laugh with over a glass of wine.

As it turns out, you can. Her name is Donna Morris, a warmhearted and bubbly North Carolinian who started her business "Best Friend in Paris" back in 2009. As the business's name suggests, Donna is more than a tour

guide: You can hire her to be your best buddy from the moment your plane touches down.

Donna, who has lived in Paris since 2006, says the idea started brewing while she was working as an apartment-hunter for a Parisian real-estate agency. “The job put me all over Paris and I was meeting all kinds of people,” Donna explains in her cheerful southern drawl.

“Because I knew the city so well, newcomers to Paris were always asking me how to do this or that, and I was always happy to help everyone out.

“A friend got very frustrated with me. He said, ‘Everybody can’t be your best friend, Donna... you should get paid for this!’ And that’s where the idea came from.”

Within a year, Donna had quit the real-estate business. After trying a few different ideas for helping Anglophones settle in Paris, she set up a website advertising her services as a professional best friend. She offers personalized tours of Paris that promise that clients will experience the city from the point of view of a local—in fact, as Donna herself does.

Although she offers a few pre-set tour packages, “usually, I pick my clients up at their hotel, and they just follow me around. A lot of them want me to help them get oriented to Paris on their first day. It helps, especially if you’re only here for three or four days.”

“I gain so much from the friendships I make.”

As best friend, Donna helps clients select and purchase the appropriate metro pass and explains how to navigate the transportation system. Then together they wander Paris, exploring Donna’s favorite neighborhoods, dropping in at little-known shops, museums, and historical sites, along with the usual must-see places. The day often ends

with their relaxing over a glass of wine together. A four-hour tour for one to four persons costs €205 (\$262), while an eight-hour tour costs €415 (\$513). But the friendship doesn't end when the tour does.

Clients often call Donna during the rest of their stay for restaurant recommendations, directions, or to chat about Paris. With some clients, Donna continues to keep in touch even after they've gone home.

"I find it hard to keep it professional, because I fall in love with everyone I meet!" Donna confesses. "But I wouldn't have it any other way. I may lose a few dollars, but I gain so much more from the friendships and acquaintances I make." Donna describes most of her clients as older American couples and women age 50+ who are traveling solo.

Donna probably could have used a friend like herself when she first moved to Paris. When she arrived from Asheville, North Carolina, six years ago, she was armed with little more than a Swiss passport (gained courtesy of her marriage to her ex-husband) and the certainty that she wanted to live in Paris. She knew no one in the city, had only visited once or twice, spoke only basic French—and yet she doesn't feel she did anything particularly bold.

"I thought, 'I'll just go,'" Donna recalls. "I wanted to live here... I had the legal right to live and work here—there was no reason not to go." She rented an apartment in the 17th arrondissement for two weeks and flew over, thinking she might stay for a year. But she adored the city's beauty and culture so much that she never left.

Donna says that formally setting up shop as an entrepreneur in Paris isn't difficult. Marketing the business, however, has been a thorn in her side. She advertises on a couple of popular Anglophone expat blogs, and the business has been featured in the travel section of the *Charlotte Observer*, which has netted her a good number of clients. Beyond that, she has mostly relied

upon word-of-mouth from former client-friends and Internet searches to win business.

But the biggest challenge for Donna hasn't been *how* to grow her business, but deciding how big to grow it. "As an '*autoentrepreneur*' (freelance entrepreneur) in France, we are not exactly encouraged to build our business, because our earnings are capped. If we exceed the cap we are thrown into a much higher tax bracket," says Donna.

Nevertheless, she remains undaunted. "I'm going to keep doing it," says Donna. "For the first time in my life, I think, I'm actually doing something that I am really, really good at and love doing." And as for Paris? "There's no place I'd rather be."

To find out more about Donna's "Best Friend in Paris" service, [see here](#).

Quick Links

[Logout](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

Your Subscriptions

[International Living Lifetime](#)

[International Living Magazine](#)

[The Savvy Retiree](#)

[Incomes Abroad](#)

[Free Reports](#)

International Living