

NOTRE DAME

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Something happens in the one small step it takes to cross from the outdoors of Paris into the cathedral of Notre Dame. It is as though someone says "Shh!"—not loudly, but emphatically. Once inside, all you hear is the soft mutter of hushed voices, mingled in awe and prayer. The immensity and timelessness of the church are overwhelming. Huge ribs of stone soar to the ceiling dramatically. Your eyes become accustomed to the dim light until you glance up at the laughing, dazzling stained glass windows. The sun cannot bounce through the bright, thick glass, but still hits your eyes with a little push. The intensity makes you squint. You follow the colors of the window, the delightful rainbow pattern. The somber marble statues which line the walls many feet below are quite a contrast. The air inside the cathedral is cool and dank, penetrated by other smells: the presence of many bodies, the warm smell of burning candles beneath the waiting statues, and the musty smell of many centuries. Steps sound hollow against the heavy cement floor. The curious crowd never stops. Fingers point, heads turn heavenward, jaws drop and children call in excited, restrained voices to their parents. The voices rise and fall. But the cathedral remains. The peace is there. The peace of Notre Dame.