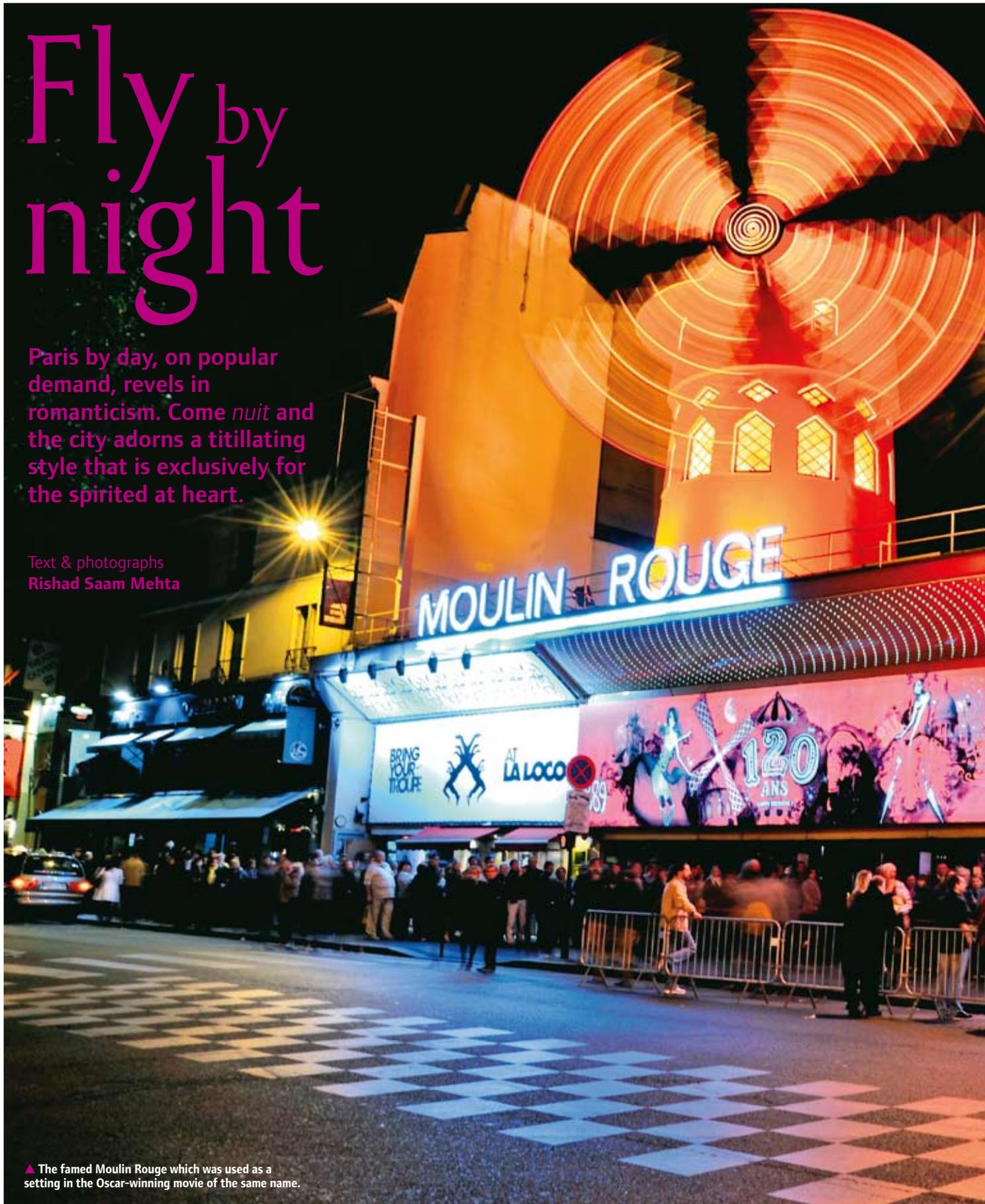


# Fly by night

Paris by day, on popular demand, revels in romanticism. Come *nuît* and the city adorns a titillating style that is exclusively for the spirited at heart.

Text & photographs  
Rishad Saam Mehta



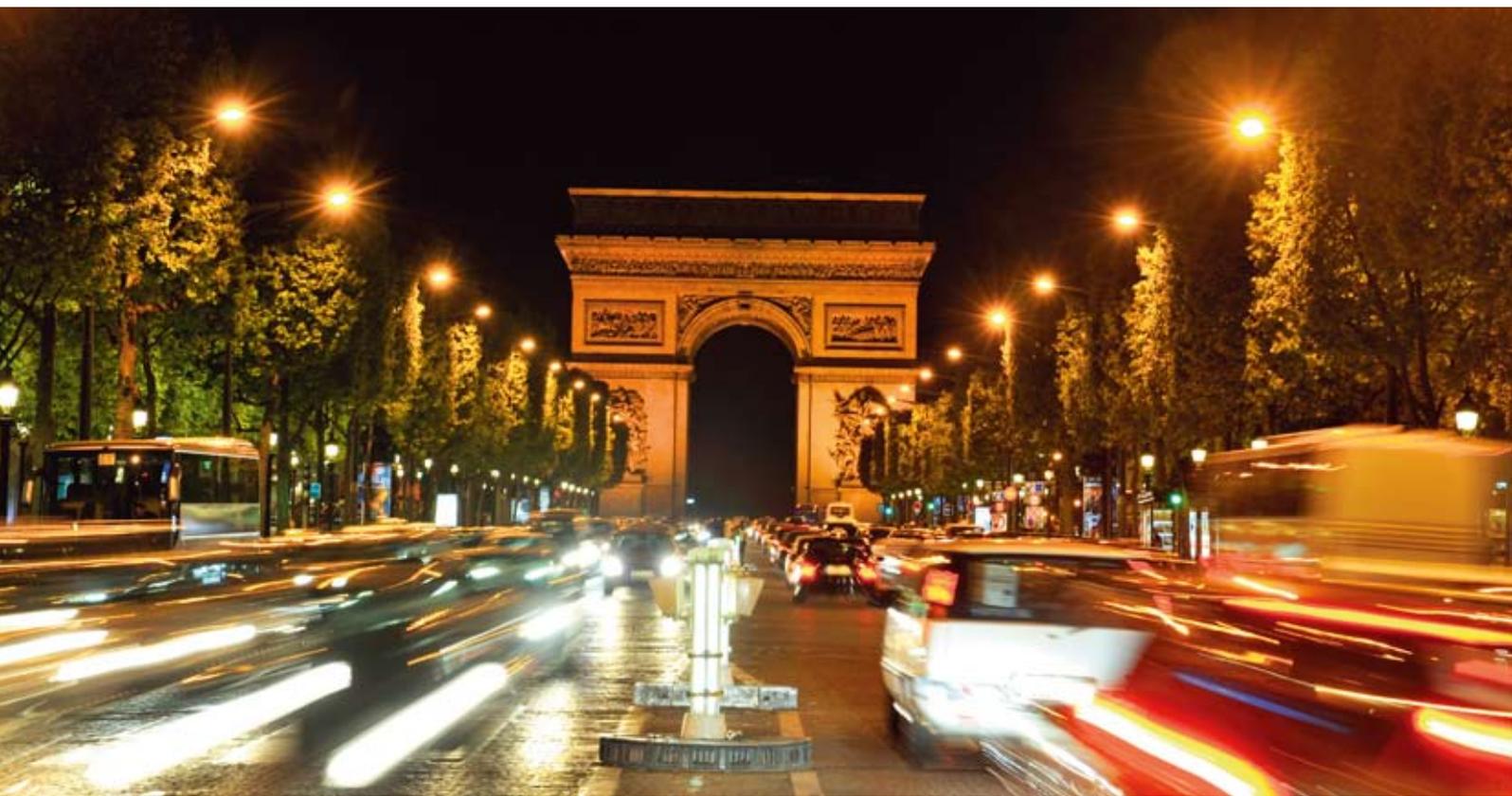
▲ The famed Moulin Rouge which was used as a setting in the Oscar-winning movie of the same name.



"Montmartre, Montmartre,  
where the throngs and the songs continue.  
Monmartre, Monmartre,  
where Parea in a spree gets in you..."

Sang Frank Sinatra along with Maurice Chevalier in the movie *Can-Can*, as they strode forward enthusiastically towards Madame Pistache's establishment to watch the saucy dance form that was banned in Paris during the 1890s.

Today, more than a century later, the songs and throngs continue in Montmartre which comes alive when daylight starts to fade. Tourists set their backsides down on comfortable yet stylish chairs (this is Paris, where form is as important as function) on pavement cafés and enjoy a celebratory glass, happy at having spent a day in one of world's most beautiful cities. I too was enjoying a pint of the Leffe at an atmospheric café with a grand view of the Sacré-Cœur and listening to the saxophonist play a beautiful rendition of *The Girl from Ipanema*.



▲ The Avenue des Champs-Élysées is a flurry of lights and restaurants even well past midnight.

From the Notre-Dame to the Musée d'Orsay, I had spent my second day in the French capital taking in Paris's grand churches, ornate bridges and magnificent museums. It had all been heavenly and beautiful. But that was Paris by day, where you walked hand in hand sharing a chocolate stuffed crêpe or a toasty vanilla waffle smothered with fresh cream, revelling in the romanticism that every part of the city magically exudes.

### Can-can go

Paris by day is like an orchestra, mellow and melodious, playing the overture from Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. But come evening, and romanticism gives way to borderline raunchiness, and the city changes gear from beautiful to sexy. Paris after dark feels like the orchestra's violinist is doing a tantalising and seductive solo on the G-string. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Moulin Rouge with its trademark red windmill that is another Montmartre landmark.

I walked in to the pleasurable aural combination of the popping of corks, the tinkling of champagne flutes and the husky strains of a tuxedo-clad jazz vocalist crooning *Luck, be a lady tonight* with a shining brass band behind. Tables were set close together and were occupied largely by tourists, all smartly dressed for an evening out.

Moulin Rouge and the *Can-Can* go together, and as Katherine the dancer I met backstage—dressed for the energetic high-kicking dance—told me, “The kick's got to rise above the head.”

It is because of this high-kicking to the quick-tempo music accompanied by suggestive shrieks from the dancers and catcalls from the audience, that the wild and colourful *Can-Can* was

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considered risqué in 19th-century Paris. Today the *Can-Can* at the Moulin Rouge has all those ingredients but the entire evening with its dances and flamboyant feather and sequined costumes is all very chic. The audience is enraptured by the brilliantly produced show which includes so much more than the *Can-Can*, in a glitzy setting helped along by computerised lights, shows of magic and fine performances that are a visual treat.

### Lady Marmalade

Step out of the Moulin Rouge and turn left and you're in the Pigalle district where subtlety is tossed away and things around get a few notches more basic. Neon lights advertise shows that might make a few blush a shade brighter than the lights, and then there is the Folies Pigalle Discothèque and Night Club at 11 Place Pigalle, with a racy programme that is very popular and definitely adult. Moulin Rouge on the other hand accepts children from ages seven upward.

While Montmartre is very alive by night, it doesn't mean that the rest of the city powers down its espresso machines and goes to bed. The Champs de Élysées with its wide pavements is a pulsating mix of window-shoppers, cinemagoers, diners and buskers. I found it an olfactory delight too as waiters rushed past in a plate-laden



More champagne and wine followed by way of an aperitif and accompaniment to the courses that consisted of a goat's-cheese salad, thyme-and-rosemary rack of lamb and crème brûlée. My world should have been upside down by now thanks to jetlag and Messrs Moët & Chandon. The shining lights of Paris by night dissipated all that and I had this sneaky feeling that calling it a night would most inevitably translate into a wet-blanket-feeling the next morning. Paris was full of revelry and gaiety, why waste it on sleep?

### And the show goes on

The Jazz bars and clubs of Paris come into their element post midnight and the Sunset Jazz Club had been recommended. So I rode the yellow line from George V and exited at the underground at the Châtelet station, crossed the Rue de Rivoli, and arrived at the club at 60, Rue des Lombards. I'd just chosen this club from amongst the many others that populate Paris at a whim and it turned out to be splendid. Conversations were down

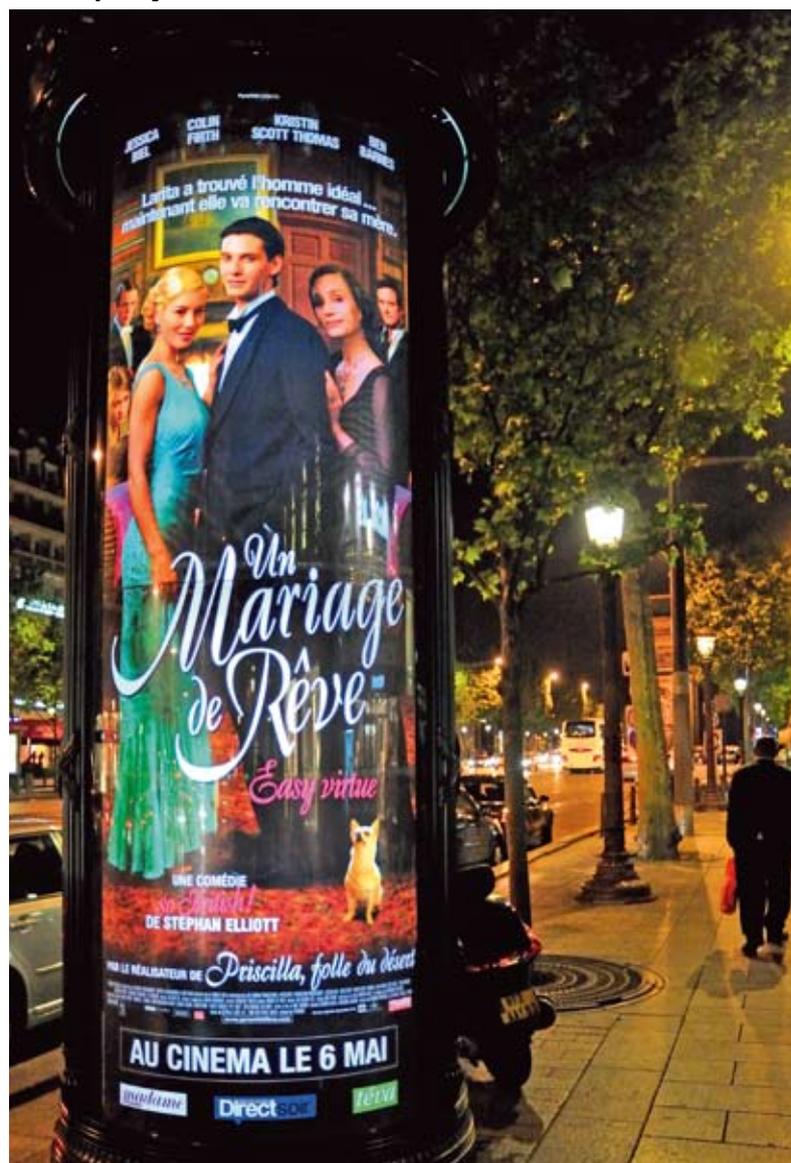
◀ Left: Performers at the Moulin Rouge.

Below: Hollywood goes French in Paris.

blur from café kitchens to pavement gazebos, leaving a trail of mouth-watering aromas. Heavy traffic continues to flow on the French capital's most famous thoroughfare well past midnight.

I was fortunate that my base in Paris – the very arty and classy Hotel Sezz – was at Plassy, just four stops away from Charles de Gaulle-Étoile at the head of Champs de Élysées. It is located a stone's throw from the Plassy underground station which can connect you to every corner of Paris. If you are not colour-blind you can easily master the Paris underground. You just need to be able to decipher the colour coded lines on the underground map.

Cabarets in this part of Paris include the very Las Vegas-like Lido and the in-your-face *Crazy Horse* on Avenue George V. The latter makes a good evening out with its jewel box kind of design, champagne buckets with every seat and dancers with names such as Betty Buttocks, Fila Volcana and Nouka Bazooka that endeavour very hard to leave little to the imagination. On my first night in Paris I'd watched the show at *Crazy Horse* after which I'd walked down Ave. George V and sat down to dinner at a café with an unrestricted view of the Eiffel Tower decked up in golden lights.



## Fact file

### Getting there

Jet Airways has daily flights to Brussels from Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, New York, Newark and Toronto. Get onward connectivity to Paris via our codeshare partner Brussels Airlines. A scenic option would be to travel by train from Brussels to Paris. You can buy Rail Europe tickets and passes on [www.raileurope.co.in](http://www.raileurope.co.in) and pay in INR.

### Accommodation

Paris spoils you for choice when it comes to stay options. A good place to stay is Hotel Sezz, which is walking distance from the Eiffel Tower and in a lovely neighbourhood. Go to [www.hotelsezz.com](http://www.hotelsezz.com) for online booking.

### Tips

For booking tickets online for Crazy Horse and Moulin Rouge Cabarets go to [www.lecrazyhorseparis.com](http://www.lecrazyhorseparis.com) and [www.moulinrouge.fr](http://www.moulinrouge.fr) respectively.

**For more information:** Log on to [www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com)

to a whisper so that even the most subtle notes from the saxophone floated across the room, complementing the crisp trumpet notes.

I remember having my last Martini Rosso on the rocks at 3 am before taking a taxi back to my hotel. My head was going to be heavy tomorrow, but the weather forecast was clear and an aromatic shot of espresso at a sidewalk café under blue skies would clear the cobwebs in my mind, and I'd be ready for yet another day and night in Paris!



▲ Against the backdrop of a starry night, the bedecked Eiffel Tower stands out.