# Paris reopens River Seine for swimming after century-long cleanup ahead of 2024 Olympics



Paris has made a historic and symbolic leap by reopening the River Seine for public swimming for the first time since 1923, marking a dramatic turnaround in urban tourism and environmental restoration. This milestone comes after an ambitious €1.4 billion cleanup project aimed at transforming the Seine into a swimmable, safe, and sustainable urban waterway in time for the 2024 Olympic Games. The city now joins a growing number of European and global destinations embracing rivers not only as cultural and natural landmarks but as vital refuges in an era of escalating heatwaves and climate change.

The revival of swimming in the Seine reflects a broader European trend where rivers have become unexpected sanctuaries amid rising summer temperatures. In cities across England, Germany, Russia, and Canada, residents and tourists alike are turning to urban waterways for relief from heatwaves, redefining how public spaces and natural resources are integrated into city life. However, this surge in water-based recreation brings complex challenges around safety, pollution, and sustainable management. Paris' experience stands out as an example of how coordinated investment, environmental vigilance, and urban planning can converge to create a new model of heatwave tourism that is both enjoyable and responsible.

For over a century, swimming in the Seine was forbidden due to industrial pollution and navigation hazards. The river was relegated to a scenic backdrop, admired but untouchable. The cleanup initiative, closely tied to Paris' Olympic aspirations, has entailed a thorough overhaul of wastewater management, including modernising sewage systems and building large rainwater reservoirs to prevent contamination during storms. Daily water quality is now rigorously monitored, meeting stringent European standards, and three designated swimming areas within the city—near the Eiffel Tower, Île Saint-Louis, and Notre Dame Cathedral—are equipped with safety measures such as lifeguards and lifebuoys. These zones accommodate over 1,000 swimmers daily, turning the Seine into a vibrant recreational hub that includes organized competitions and free access until the end of summer.

The city's move has been widely welcomed by locals and tourists, many expressing surprise and delight at the Seine’s unexpectedly warm and clean waters. Yet, some Parisians remain cautious, mindful of the river's polluted past and occasional debris. Officials acknowledge these concerns, emphasising ongoing vigilance and transparency in water testing. This mix of enthusiasm and wariness underlines a psychological and cultural shift: the Seine is no longer just a historic icon or a backdrop for romantic imagery but a living, interactive element of Parisian urban life, symbolising resilience and renewal.

Paris' reopening of the Seine for swimming not only impacts local recreation but signals a broader shift in urban environmental management. The city’s experience may inspire other global metropolises with polluted waterways to pursue similar transformations, blending ecological restoration with tourism and public health benefits. Moreover, as climate change drives more frequent and intense heatwaves, urban swimming may become an essential adaptation strategy, providing residents and visitors with accessible means to cool down while connecting with nature within city limits.

The Olympic Games amplify this achievement, spotlighting the river as a stage for world-class events and promoting sustainable urban tourism. Parallel initiatives to decarbonize river transport and enhance green infrastructure around the Seine are underway, further embedding environmental goals in the city's development plans. Yet maintaining water quality remains a long-term challenge, requiring continuous investment, public education, and careful balance between tourism growth and ecosystem health.

This renewed relationship with the Seine redefines Parisian identity and travel experiences. Visitors can now physically engage with the city’s history and landscape in ways previously unimaginable—gliding through the emerald-green waters framed by gothic spires and the Eiffel Tower. This integration of recreation, sustainability, and cultural heritage offers a distinctive, memorable form of urban tourism that holds the potential to reshape how cities worldwide adapt to a warming planet and evolving visitor expectations.

In sum, Paris' bold plunge into the River Seine marks the dawn of a new era of urban water engagement. It exemplifies a fusion of environmental recovery, climate adaptability, and fresh tourism narratives. As more cities face the realities of heatwaves and seek sustainable leisure options, Paris stands as a beacon of possibility, inviting the world to reimagine the role of rivers in the cityscape—not just as monuments but as vibrant, life-giving spaces for all to share.

### 📌 Reference Map:

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2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/paris-opens-river-seine-public-swimming-first-time-since-1923-2025-07-05/> - For the first time since 1923, Paris has opened the River Seine for public swimming, following an extensive clean-up campaign driven by its use in the 2024 Paris Olympics. From now until August 31, three sites along the Seine within the city will accommodate over 1,000 swimmers daily. The initiative, praised by both locals and tourists, marks a milestone in environmental and urban development. Significant investments were made to ensure water safety, including connecting homes to the sewer system, modernizing water treatment facilities, and building rainwater reservoirs to prevent sewer overflows. Despite Olympic delays caused by heavy rains, events eventually proceeded, strengthening public trust in the Seine's cleanliness. Daily water quality monitoring, utilizing a flag system, will ensure swimmer safety throughout the summer. Additionally, 14 more swimming areas outside Paris on the Seine and Marne rivers are either open or set to open soon, further enhancing recreational access. The reopening has been widely welcomed as a positive step for the environment, community, and urban living. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/paris-opens-river-seine-public-swimming-first-time-since-1923-2025-07-05/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/4ba28e3b0c9c224a1811f538df2a208e> - On July 5, 2025, Parisians legally swam in the Seine River for the first time in over a century, celebrating the success of a €1.4 billion ($1.5 billion) cleanup project initiated ahead of the 2024 Olympics. Public swimming is now allowed in designated areas near the Eiffel Tower and Île Saint-Louis, equipped with safety measures including lifebuoys and lifeguards. The Seine was previously closed for swimming since 1923 due to pollution and navigation risks. Mayor Anne Hidalgo showcased the river's improved water quality by presenting a bottle of Seine water, supported by environmental authorities confirming bacteria levels are within European standards. While many citizens expressed joy and surprise at the river’s warmth and cleanliness, some remained cautious due to residual debris. Overall, the event marked a historic and symbolic moment, reflecting environmental progress and urban renewal in Paris. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/4ba28e3b0c9c224a1811f538df2a208e?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://apnews.com/article/6ff093114f6addf0489b2bea952789e1> - For the first time in over a century, the River Seine in Paris has reopened for public swimming following a €1.4 billion ($1.5 billion) cleanup project. Swimming was banned since 1923 due to pollution and navigation hazards. The cleanup included advanced disinfection systems, new sewage connections for houseboats and homes upstream, and the construction of a massive storage basin to reduce water contamination during rainfall. The project aimed to make the Seine suitable for Olympic events during the 2024 Games, and its continued safe condition is now enabling public use. Three swimming sites near Notre Dame Cathedral, the Eiffel Tower, and eastern Paris are opening, with daily water testing ensuring compliance with European standards. While authorities emphasize improved water quality, some experts and locals remain skeptical, citing sporadic bacterial spikes and murky water. Despite concerns, public enthusiasm is high, with organized competitions and free, supervised access until the end of August. The initiative is hailed as a symbolic reclaiming of the river and a long-term legacy of the Paris Olympics. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/6ff093114f6addf0489b2bea952789e1?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/07/14/paris-2024-olympics-promises-a-return-to-the-seine_6683880_23.html> - As Paris prepares for the 2024 Olympic Games, significant efforts have been made to restore the Seine River, enabling it to be swimmable once again after being prohibited for a century. The state and local authorities have invested €1.4 billion since 2018 to clean the river, ensuring it meets European water quality directives. This initiative prompted extensive corrective measures on wastewater management, aiming to make the entire metropolitan area’s waters swimmable by summer 2025. Meanwhile, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo's first dip in the Seine has been delayed, while Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castéra has already taken the plunge. The Olympic Games will highlight the Seine with multiple events and infrastructure centered around it, promoting the river's crucial role in the city's history and future. This includes substantial efforts to enhance river transport to reduce road traffic, exemplified by companies like Ikea and Franprix utilizing waterways for logistics. The goal is to decarbonize and lessen the environmental impact, accelerating climate change mitigation efforts. Furthermore, greening the boat fleet is also underway with electric and hybrid vessels supporting Olympic activities and future city logistics. ([lemonde.fr](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/07/14/paris-2024-olympics-promises-a-return-to-the-seine_6683880_23.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://time.com/6261729/seine-clean-up-paris-olympics-2024/> - In Paris, a significant effort is underway to clean the Seine River, aiming to make it swimmable by the 2024 Olympics. This €1.4 billion ($1.5 billion) project marks a rare achievement for a major metropolis and holds historical significance for Parisians, as swimming has been banned in the Seine since 1923 due to pollution. The initiative is seen as a way to connect modern Paris to its history and adds environmental, health, and economic benefits, including the revival of fish stocks and the creation of thousands of jobs. The Olympics will leverage the cleaned river for events and ceremonies. Key challenges include addressing outdated sewage systems and building infrastructure like a massive rainwater storage tank. Despite progress, maintaining public confidence in the water's safety remains a concern. However, officials are optimistic that these efforts will set an example for other cities facing similar environmental issues. ([time.com](https://time.com/6261729/seine-clean-up-paris-olympics-2024/?utm_source=openai))