

Parisians asked for ideas to recapture 'je ne sais quoi' of the Champs-Élysées

The famed avenue at the heart of Paris is now tacky, overpriced, and only frequented by tourists, locals say

By David Chazan

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The Champs-Élysées, long-called the world's most beautiful avenue, is now little more than a tourist trap, Parisians say | CREDIT: Bruno de Hogues/Stockbyte

The French have long called the Champs-Élysées “the world’s most beautiful avenue”, but its lustre has faded and Parisians have now been invited to suggest ideas for restoring its former glory.

Long renowned for elegance and refinement, its image has been tarnished by mass tourism, fast food outlets, pollution and overpriced cafés, according to many Parisians.

Most of the French capital’s residents now avoid it, a recent survey indicated.

Each day 100,000 people stroll along the legendary street, lined with luxury car showrooms and designer clothes stores, but only 5 per cent of them live in Paris, the survey found.

It suggests that 71 per cent of Parisians think it is a tourist trap, 26 per cent say it is too noisy, and 10 per cent find it stressful and dangerous.

Properties on the Champs-Élysées still fetch astronomical prices, though.

A Norwegian oil fund bought a building for a record price of €613 million (£511m) in October, but residents and local business owners believe the avenue desperately needs a makeover.

They have formed a committee which commissioned Philippe Chiambaretta, a Parisian architect, to draw up a €150 million (£125m) plan for a public-private partnership to give the Champs-Élysées its first facelift since 1993. He proposes to reduce the number of traffic lanes, widen pavements, plant more trees and recreate a landscaped promenade.

The Champs-Élysées Committee has raised €1 million for a campaign to persuade the next Paris mayor to take up the plan after municipal elections in March.

On Friday the committee opened an immersive multi-media exhibition recounting the history of the Champs-Élysées, and showing what it would look like if the plans are carried out.

It is urging members of the public to vote on the choices and submit their own suggestions online before the exhibition closes on May 10.

“It is not the world’s most beautiful avenue, but it is certainly the most famous,” Mr Chiambaretta said.

“This is a powerful symbol, but we see that Parisians have fallen out of love with this avenue. It is time to ask ourselves how to make this place desirable again.”

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