



Le Louvre

The biggest museum in the world lies both above and below ground. The famous glass "Pyramide" was designed by the Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei for a make-over of the museum in 1989. It was very controversial when it was first built but seems to be accepted as part of the museum now. In fact, there are several pyramids scattered around the Louvre, and the one inside, the upside down pyramid, is a favourite meeting point for people.



Originally, Le Louvre was the Royal Palace before it became a museum in 1793 and later during Napoleon III's time. It displays one of the biggest collections in the world, covering art, sculpture and artefacts from both Eastern and Western civilisations. The make over allowed the museum to display more items, but even so, there are still at least 75,000 paintings which are kept in storage and post 18th century works have been moved to the Musée d'Orsay.

Outside the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel reflects the better known Arc de Triomphe about 2 km away, at the far end of the avenue. This Arc was built during Napoleon I's reign, in 1809 to celebrate the successes of the Imperial armies.



Inside, the Louvre offers a wonderful selection of items – from da Vinci's Mona Lisa, to the one of the world's best Egyptology collections, Greek artefacts, Sumerian stele....to the personal rooms of Napoleon III. Deep down, you can visit the original foundations and walls of the old royal castle. Remember that the Mona Lisa is called "La Joconde" in France.

Be warned. Do not wander off on your own in the Louvre. It is very easy to become lost. It is an enormous palace, on many levels, with hundreds of rooms. (If you visit the museum properly, you would need to spend many days there.) Ensure that you stay with the group at all times. Remember

that you cannot take photos with a flash. You may have your camera confiscated if you do.

Le Louvre has a selection of good shops which are excellent for "different" souvenirs, though they may be a little pricey. The Louvre Museum shop offers copies of ancient jewellery. Virgin Megastore sells CDs and DVDs. Many French people purchase goods from these shops for presents or general use.



La Tour Eiffel

What more can be said about the world's most visited and most recognised monument?

- More than 320 metres high – first stage at 57metres, and second stage at 115 metres.
- 18, 038 pieces of metal
- 2,500,000 rivets
- Weighs 10,100 tonnes
- 6 million visitors per year
- View up to 90 km in good weather

Built in 1889for the World Expo, which marked the centenary of the French Revolution as the result of a competition to find a worth tourist attraction. It took two years for Eiffel and his workmen to complete the work. Parisians sneered at the Tower to start with. Famous "savants" and artists of the day stated that it was unthinkable that a mere engineer, a maker of machines, could construct a work of art.

However, the Tower provided inspiration for many artists and came to be loved by its detractors, so much so, that when it was due for demolition in 1909 along with all the other Expo buildings, they demonstrated for it to be left. By this time, it was already serving a technological purpose as a telegraphic relay and weather station!

Look for the names of the city councillors of Eiffel's time on the exterior of the tower.

The Tour is opposite Le Palais de Chaillot.

Le Palais de Chaillot

This was built for the World Expo of 1937. Its design reflects its era. It houses, three museums, the cinemathèque, and the national theatre. Le Musée de l'Homme – covering all ages and civilisations of mankind, and Le Musée de la Marine – tracing the history of the French navy from the ships of the 1800s to Nuclear submarines - are here. Its models and relics from wrecks make it one of the best marine museums in the world.

Nearby is Le Palais d'Art Moderne, the museum where you can see paintings by late 19th century and early 20th century modern artists, such as Matisse, Dufy, Picasso, Modigliani and Chagall.



Pont Alexandre III

Many people think that the Pont Alexandre III is the most beautiful bridge in Paris. This bridge dates back to the period of the Double Entente, when France was developing its relationship with Russian Tsar of the same name. The Tsar of Russia laid the first stone of this bridge which was built for the World Expo of 1900. The bridge was restored for the year 2000 in its original colours and again, what looks like gold is gold. The light globes are hand blown. Because it symbolises the Paris "look" and feel of the Belle Époque, this bridge often features in movies. This bridge leads to Les Invalides.



Les Invalides

This is the view of Les Invalides taken looking through the front doorway towards the dome of the royal chapel of St Louis, which houses the tomb of Napoleon. The real name of this building is "Hotel des Invalides". In French the real meaning of the word "Hotel" is a mansion.

Originally, this was a military hospital built by order of the Sun King, Louis XIV, during the late 1670s, and his equestrian sculpture is above the imposing main doorway. Part of it is still used as a military hospital today, with about 100 pensioners. Nowadays, most of it houses Le Musée de l'Armée – the French War Museum, and one of the biggest war museums in the world. It traces the history of French warfare from the middle ages to the end of World War II. Special exhibitions vary from year to year.

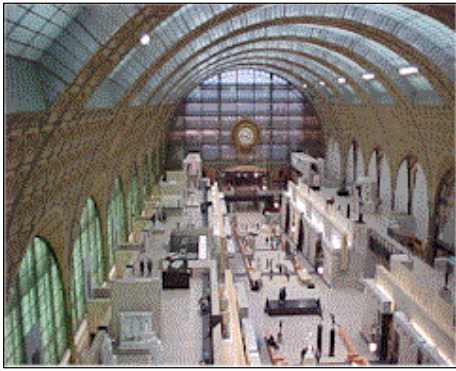


The dome of the chapel is beautiful and covered in real gold. It was re-gilt for the Bicentennial in 1989, at considerable expense. The chapel inside is really a soldiers' chapel, since it houses the tombs of many famous French generals. Napoleon's tomb is in the crypt, housed in no fewer than six coffins inside a monumental tomb of red porphyry.

Musée d'Orsay

It looks like a railway station and it was a railway station! After World War II, when the art collections were re-assembled, the curators of the Louvre realised that there just was no longer neither the space to store, nor display all their artwork and sculptures. The Gare d'Orsay was a ruined station, derelict since 1947 when it was redesigned as a museum to display artwork between 1848 and 1914. It was opened in 1986. It is best known for its wonderful collection of Impressionist art.

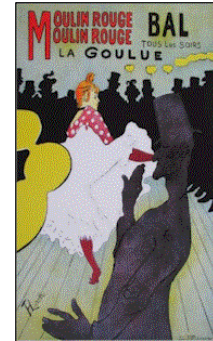
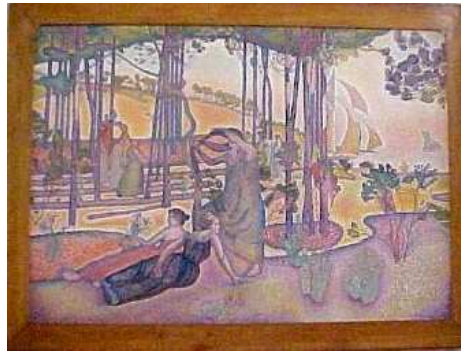




Inside, you will see how cleverly the platforms, the railway and the station rooms have been integrated to display the paintings and sculptures. There are even the original station clocks, and on an upper level, the restaurant decorated in gold, and the original railway hotel ballroom, still sumptuous in its painstakingly recreated décor. It's like taking a step out of time visiting these rooms.

Here, you will see the whole development of the major art movements during the 19th century. Sculptures and paintings by Degas, works by Van Gogh, Manet, Monet, Renoir, the pastels of Toulouse Lautrec, the pointillist painters like Seurat, and the works of Cezanne to mention just a few.

There are rooms featuring the design furniture of the period, too.



Montmartre

Montmartre evokes ideas of artists, Sacré Coeur, the Moulin Rouge, and Amélie. It is one of the few hills in Paris, next to the Eiffel Tower, Sacré Coeur is the second highest point in Paris.

In the 19th century, this was a country area outside Paris. Artists liked the quality of light on this hill, out of the smoke, grime and noise of the centre of Paris. Many famous painters lived and worked here, Van Gogh, Lautrec, Seurat, Monet etc. It is still the haunt of artists but today these are painters who provide the tourist market with souvenirs.

The Place du Tertre behind Sacré Coeur comes to life with artists' easels during the afternoons. It is also reputed to be the place in Paris where you are most likely to have your pocket picked so be careful when you visit!



The Basilica of Sacré Coeur (Sacred Heart) is a modern church, started in 1870 and completed in 1914, and is best known for its beautiful white domes which grace the Paris skyline. You climb steep, winding streets, linked by stairways with steep steps to reach the Basilica; or you can take the funicular railway

which travels up the steep hill side, and which is part of the Métro system. There are gardens and parks on the hill side, but these are closed at dusk.

There is some argument about the origin of the name Montmartre. Originally, the Romans had a temple built to the god Mars on the top of the hill and called it Mons Martius. (Mars Hill). The Christian, Saint Denis met an unhappy end when

he was beheaded on the hill top, in front of the temple, for his Christian beliefs in the 4th century.

Legend says that he picked up his head and carried it to the bottom of the hill to a spot where he was eventually buried. Christians changed the name to Mont du Martyre or Martyr's Hill. You can see a big fountain with a statue of St. Denis carrying his head in a park near Sacré Coeur.



Place Pigalle et les Café Concerts.

The streets surrounding Sacré Coeur and Montmartre come to life in the evening. In La Place Pigalle is the Moulin Rouge, the high class night club, with world class dancing and shows. This area has a reputation for being the "red light" district of Paris developed from the role it began to play during the nineteenth century and the "Belle Époque".

Poor Jean Baptiste Pigalle would probably have a fit if he realised that his name would one day be associated with the "sleaze" area of Paris. He was the court sculptor for Louis XV and sculpted many religious statues during his career! (the most famous one being Our Lady in the Church of Saint Sulpice of the Da Vinci code fame!)



The 19th century was the era of the "Café Concert", a place where pleasure, food, drink and entertainment reigned, and people of all classes could mix. What made these cabarets unusual was the complete social mix that could be found enjoying the entertainment. Thanks to their low entry prices, aristocrats, society women, bankers, doctors, artists, journalists, workmen and prostitutes, could not only share the same table but also discovered that they shared the same tastes in entertainment!

Initially the two most famous Café Concerts were Le Chat Noir and Les Folies-Bergère. Le Chat Noir got its unusual name because its owner found a black cat, lost on the footpath outside. The type of entertainment that was offered was as eclectic as the audience. There were singers, dancers, jugglers, clowns, plays, melodramas, religious presentations, circus acts with horses and even imported boxing kangaroos! There were also trapeze artistes and lion shows (where from time to time the artistes and/or the tamers suffered a rather unfortunate fate, which tended to add to the attraction of the show!) A famous singer was Aristide Bruant, whose song themes included the homeless, people out of work, prostitution, and poverty – again unusual themes for the times.



The Moulin Rouge was one of the café concerts. It is now one of the world's most famous cabarets. It was opened to cater for the visitors for the World Expo of 1889 (like the Eiffel Tower). It very soon became famous for its trade mark dance – The French Can-Can, considered extremely shocking for its era. Its dancers became famous, partly because of the posters created by Toulouse Lautrec. Jane Avril, La Goulue and Yvette Guilbert were its leading ladies and loved by the deformed painter.

Today, the Moulin Rouge is recognised as one of the world's leading cabarets and employs only the highest quality dancers who have to train extremely hard. There are many Australian girls who dance in the line up. The revues are very expensive to attend but the costumes, the décor and the routines are stunning. It is still the home of the Can-Can!



Perhaps the best known person connected with Montmartre is the painter, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who lived in the area during the last 20 years of the 19th century. He broke both his legs when he was 12, and because of a genetic disease, his bone atrophied and he stopped growing. He was only 1m45, stooped and used a cane. Because he came from a wealthy aristocratic family, he had no need to “work” for a living.

He was fascinated by the life of the people who worked in and frequented the café concerts. He was rejected by mainstream society because of his physical disfigurement, and consequently, spent a great deal of time with those who accepted him as he was. His friends were the poor and the marginalised, the circus and cabaret artistes, the prostitutes and the clientele. His paintings feature these people in stark realism, without too many details – his idea was to capture moments of their lives like a snapshot. His posters are recognisable world wide and reflect a Japanese influence in their design, with the use of silhouettes and blocks of colour – very innovative for its time. The hand and the violin, matched with the colourful clothing of the danseuse, Yvette Guilbert, are good examples of this. Yvette had a long affair with Toulouse-Lautrec.

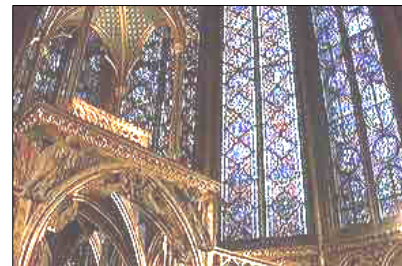


Toulouse-Lautrec was an alcoholic (in fact, he secreted a long, thin, bottle of wine inside his cane). He met a sad and lonely end in 1899 in a mental hospital, aged only 36 years.

For more about Toulouse-Lautrec's paintings, refer to the Musée d'Orsay.

Ile de la cité - La Sainte Chapelle

The chapel was constructed for Saint Louis in the 13th century to receive the sacred relic of the crown of thorns and a piece of the True Cross (which is in Notre Dame today). Louis spent two and half times the cost of building the Chapel itself to obtain these relics from his cousin (who was the Emperor of Constantinople) and to have a suitable bejewelled casket made to hold them! During the anti-religious period of the Revolution, its destruction was seriously considered. Eventually it was restored during the 1800s, when the Middle Ages became a “popular” fashion theme.



Inside, there are two levels, the lower one for the servants and people, and the upper one for the King and court. Its stained glass windows are the oldest in Paris and represent 1134 scenes from the Old and New testaments. 720 of them date from the 13th century.

Le Palais de Justice

Even from Roman times, this part of Paris- on the islands in the Seine- housed government, administration and the law courts. The Palais de Justice forms part of the complex with La Conciergerie. The early French kings lived in this area before they moved to Le Louvre during the 14th century. The Tour de L'Horloge dates from the 14th century, and the clock is the first public clock in Paris. The other towers have names; one is called ‘bonbec’ which means “good talker” – this is because it once housed the torturers who could make anyone talk!

The entry to the Palais de Justice itself dates to just before the Revolution, 1786. It was in this building that so many people during the Revolution, as well as King Louis XVI and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, were condemned to death.

