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A Guide To The Louvre, Paris

By Audrey Akeman

The Musée du Louvre is undoubtedly one of the world's finest art collections, and there would be nowhere more fitting to house such a collection than the magnificent Louvre Palace, an immense Renaissance complex once used as the residence of French royalty. There's so much to see that it would be possible to spend a whole day or more exploring it. Here's a guide to the building and the splendid works of art within it, to help plan a visit to the Louvre and see the best of what it has to offer.

History

The original building on this site was a fortress constructed by King Phillippe-Auguste in the 12th century to protect the city from the Vikings. The Louvre then evolved over the centuries to meet the needs of its various inhabitants. The first significant alterations were made by Francois I, who had a brand new Renaissance palace built, and from then a succession of monarchs and rulers all left their mark, extending and altering it until it became the stunning vast complex that it is today. The most recent changes were made in the late 20th century to improve the building's use as a visitor attraction. Architect I M Pei added a striking glass and steel pyramid in the main courtyard as a new entrance area, which has now become one of the most famous images of the Louvre.

A tour of the architecture

As you wander around the impressive art collections, don't forget to look out for the wonderful architecture all around. You'll see the glass pyramid as you enter the museum, but before you do, take a walk around the courtyards to have a look at some of the beautiful external features. Perrault's Colonnade on the east side of the building is an impressive columned façade designed in the classical style by Claude Perrault at the behest of Louis XIV in 1679. The design was so popular at the time that it set a trend for other buildings all over Europe. The oldest part of the building can be seen in an excavated area under what is now the Cour Carrée. The Medieval Moats show the foundations of the drawbridge and towers of the original fortress. The Jardin du Carrousel is also worth exploring. It's a wonderful open space with a formally laid out garden and a magnificent triumphal arch as its centrepiece. The Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel was built by Napoleon in 1805 to celebrate French military victories.

The collections

The Museum holds over 35,000 works of art across an area of over 60,000 square metres.

Antiquities

There are three major collections of ancient artefacts: Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquities; Egyptian antiquities and Near Eastern antiquities.

The highlights of the Greek, Etruscan and Roman collections are the Roman and Greek glassware from the 6th century BC, Roman silverware and mosaics from 1–3 AD, and clay and bronze Etruscan sculptures from the 9th to the 1st centuries BC. Also of interest are two exquisite Greek marble statues from the Hellenistic period (3rd to 2nd century BC) - Venus de Milo and the Winged Victory of

Samothrace.

The Egyptian collection holds pieces from the late prehistoric period (4000 BC) to the early Christian period (4 AD). Don't miss the religious and funerary objects such as embalming pots, urns, vases and busts, and the fascinating objects from everyday life.

One of the most fascinating objects in the Near Eastern collection is one of the world's oldest legal documents, a Mesopotamian engraved tablet.

Paintings

The Louvre's extensive collection of paintings covers every school of painting from all over Europe from the 14th century to the mid 19th century. French, German, Dutch, Flemish, Spanish, Italian, Scandinavian and English painters are all well represented.

Flemish painter Jan Van Eyck's Madonna of the Chancellor Rolin is one of the oldest works, dating from 1435. There's a great collection of Rembrandt masterpieces, such as Bathsheba (1654) and Disciples at Emmaus (1648).

The Italian section is probably the biggest crowd puller, though, which has some fabulous Renaissance paintings by Giotto, Raphael, Boticcelli, Titian, Caravaggio and of course Leonardo da Vinci, whose Mona Lisa is the museum's most famous and well loved painting.

Prints and Drawings

Works on paper, such as prints, pastels and drawings, are given a whole section. Some of the key works, which date from the 14th century to the 19th century, are those by da Vinci, Pisano, Michelangelo, Raphael, Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein.

Sculpture

The sculptures held by the Louvre date from the 12th century to the mid 19th century and are mainly European. One of the most impressive and unusual pieces is the tomb of Phillippe Pot, a 15th century Burgundian aristocrat, which is flanked by eight hooded monks.

Don't miss the celebrated Marly Horses, housed in their own glass-topped courtyard, Cour Marly. These beautiful statues of wild horses were sculpted by French Guillaume Coustou in the mid 18th century. Around them are some of the museum's other best French sculptures, including busts of key intellectual, literary and political figures such as Voltaire and Diderot.

Decorative arts

The applied and decorative arts include jewellery, ceramics, furniture, tapestries, clocks, glassware, ivories and bronzes, again dating from the Middle Ages to the mid 19th century. There are over 8,000 pieces. Some of the most exquisite objects are the French Crown Jewels, including coronation crowns, swords and sceptres. The stunning Regent diamond, one of the world's purest precious stones, was worn by Louis XV at his coronation and is on display here. Other items include Charles V's gold sceptre, made in 1375, and Napoleon's coronation crown. The Hunts of Maximilian tapestries are one of the other most impressive parts of the decorative arts collection. This series of huge wall hangings

was made for Charles V in the mid 16th century.

Islamic art

This is the museum's newest collection, opened to the public in 2003. Over a thousand works from a period spanning over 13 centuries are on display. Most of the pieces are luxury objects of art which were created for the rich and powerful of various Islamic countries, such as sculptures, vases, glassware and carvings.

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Top Tourist Attractions In Paris

By Claire Quaty

If you are visiting Paris for the first time, you might be overwhelmed when planning your itinerary and deciding which attractions to visit and in what order. Let's take a look at the top attractions in Paris that are a must see when planning your visit.

First you'll want to visit the Eiffel Tower. This icon of Paris is located at Eiffel Tower Champs de Mars. Admission to the tower is 10,70 €. The phone number is 33 (0) 1 44 11 23 23. The Eiffel Tower was built in 1899 and was originally supposed to be a temporary symbol for the 1899 World's Fair. If you really want to be "wowed" by this structure, visit it in the evening, as the lights of Paris are a breath

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taking view from the top floor. The tower includes restaurants and shopping. Tickets to the second floor and the top floor can be purchased at the information office at the base of the tower. Expect to wait for the elevator and expect to be a little confused by its configuration. Even with these slight inconveniences, a trip to Paris wouldn't be complete without a trip to the magnificent Paris icon - the Eiffel Tower.

After visiting the Eiffel Tower, your next stop in Paris should be the Muse du Louvre. Admission is 8,50 euros. The phone number is +33 1 40 20 53 17. You may want to plan to visit the Louvre more than once during your trip, as it is impossible to see the entire 30,000 piece collection in the world's largest museum. The Louvre was built in 1200 and in the 1500s became the royal family's palace. The Louvre was opened as a museum in 1793. In the 1980s, glass pyramids were built to serve as the entrance and are a fantastic sight. Once inside the museum, be sure to stop at the information desk first to pick up a free map and to get the schedule of the 90 minute guided tours being offered that day. The museum can be confusing even with the map and a guided tour is recommended. The Louvre is broken up into three wings: Richelieu, Sully and Denon. Within these three wings, the museum is then divided into nine collections: the History of the Louvre and Medieval Louvre, Oriental Antiquities, Arts os Islam, Egyptian Antiquities, Sculptures, Objects d'art, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, and Arts of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Photography is allowed at the museum so don't forget your camera.

The next stop on your tour of Paris, France should be the Notre Dame Cathedrale located at 6 place du Parvis Notre-Dame. The Cathedrale Notre-Dame was built in 1163 but was not completed until the 14 th century. This is a very historical sight in Paris. Napoleon crowned himself emperor here and General de Gaulle gave thanks here when the Germans freed Paris. One thing to be wary of is that the Cathedrale is under restoration construction and part of it may be unobservable.

Next on the tour is Basilique du Sacre-Coeur located at 35, rue du Chevalier-de-la-Barre. The phone number is +33 1 53 41 89 00. The main reason for visiting this church that sits atop a large hill just past Montmartre's main square is to take in the amazing view of Paris that this location offers. While in the area be sure to walk around the streets of Montmartre's Place du Tertre. It is almost as if this area has been frozen in time and remains very similar to the time when Van Gogh resided here.

Claire Quaty was born in France and writes ebooks, articles and for magazines. Some of your work is located at:

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