



FRANCK FERRAND

**DISCOVER
FRANCE
IN
100
DESTINATIONS**

Flammarion

PARIS

Although fond of his native region in western France, writer Jean Giraudoux acknowledged that Paris represented “the five thousand hectares of the world most thought about, spoken about, and written about.” It is also the most richly endowed with beautiful and fascinating attractions. But the iconic landmarks should not distract from the thousand other small treasures awaiting the curious visitor.



1. PONT ALEXANDRE III

Combining eclecticism, splendor, and Franco-Russian goodwill, this bridge is an icon of the Belle Époque.

Fin-de-siècle Paris was bustling as the World's Fair of 1900 approached. The ungainly Palais d'Industrie had been demolished and replaced by the Grand Palais and Petit Palais. On the opposite bank of the Seine, Les Invalides station was poised to welcome a stream of visitors. All that was needed now was a broad, practical bridge to span the river. In the euphoria of the Franco-Russian alliance, it was decided that the bridge would be dedicated to that distant empire which, for now, was the French Republic's only real ally: it would be named after the late Tsar Alexander III. So his son, Nicholas II, came to Paris to lay the first stone on October 7, 1896. It proved a tricky construction project: the architects were required to ensure that a pedestrian walking along the Champs-Élysées could see Les Invalides on the far side beyond the bridge, which ruled out an arched design. Cast steel and massive abutments resolved this conundrum, and the work was even finished on time. As for its ornamentation, the bridge sports four enormous columns topped with golden statues that harmonize with the Dôme des Invalides, and Gallic cockerels rub shoulders with Russian eagles on lampposts placed like candlesticks on a table.

→ en.parisinfo.com/transport/73135/Pont-Alexandre-III

2. SAINTE-CHAPELLE

A truly imposing reliquary, designed to house the crown of thorns.

There is nothing like the famous Sainte-Chapelle. This masterpiece from the reign of Louis IX—also known as Saint Louis and the only French king to be canonized—should be at the top of any must-see list. You arrive at Boulevard du Palais, agog with curiosity, and enter the labyrinth of the Palais de Justice, before crossing a grand courtyard to access the lower chapel, which—although admittedly beautifully restored—does not take long to view. But don't be disheartened and leave with a wash of disappointment: take the warden's advice and head upstairs, where a truly spectacular sight awaits you. You'll be amazed. The upper chapel, with its restored stained-glass windows depicting 1,113 biblical scenes, is not only a pinnacle of Gothic art but also the first house of glass in history. The devout sovereign had wanted this immense reliquary the size of a church to house sacred Christian treasures purchased from the Byzantines, including the holy crown of thorns. Built at the very heart of the Palais de la Cité, then a royal residence, Sainte-Chapelle remains one of the capital's highlights, centuries after its construction.

→ www.sainte-chapelle.fr/en



Pages 12-13: Pont Alexandre III.
Above: Sainte-Chapelle.

3. LES INVALIDES

This royal building—now a national monument—is a striking example of baroque architecture at its height.

According to the 1670 foundation edict, Louis XIV's plan was for "a royal residence to accommodate all officers and soldiers, when disabled, old, or veteran." The Bourbons were certainly no strangers to war, and many of them were able to apply to be convalescents, finding here the "rest and tranquility" that their king had promised. In 1678, a residents' church, dedicated to Saint Louis, was added to the royal hostel, followed by the gold-topped Dôme des Invalides in 1706—Jules Hardouin-Mansart's breathtaking masterpiece, and perhaps the most beautiful example of classical architecture in Paris. Louis Philippe chose the Dôme to house the monumental tomb of Napoleon I, designed by Visconti, when his ashes were repatriated in 1840. Near the emperor's tomb—also the resting place of his son one hundred years later—is Vauban's mausoleum, as well as the tombs of illustrious marshals, including Ferdinand Foch and Hubert Lyautey. The Hôtel National des Invalides, which still honors its vocation as a hospital-hospice, also houses several museums, including the Musée de l'Armée, an impressive military museum with more than half a million artifacts. Its main courtyard serves as the setting for formal tributes by the Republic to soldiers who have lost their lives in service to France, as well as victims of terrorism and VIPs.

→ www.musee-armee.fr/en



4. ARC DE TRIOMPHE

Standing at the center of the vast Étoile traffic circle, this arch is the most potent symbol of French power.

Promised by Napoleon I to his soldiers in 1806, the day after the Battle of Austerlitz, the Arc de Triomphe was initially intended as a permanent reminder of the Grande Armée's victories. In its design, the architect Jean-François Chalgrin paid tribute to antiquity, a style then in vogue. Construction was interrupted several times and was completed only three decades later, in 1836, in the reign of Louis Philippe, known as the July Monarchy. Out of a desire for conciliation, the July Monarchy ensured that, in addition to being dedicated to the victories of the Grande Armée, the monument also reflected France's more recent upheavals: of the four high-reliefs decorating the pillars of the arch, two are devoted to the Empire, a third to the Revolution, and the fourth to the Restoration, François Rude's sculptural group being the most celebrated. The ultimate consecration came in 1885, when the newly established Republic staged Victor Hugo's lavish funeral at the Arc de Triomphe. At the end of World War I, the Third Republic installed the tomb of the unknown soldier here, complete with an eternal flame. This spectacular monument, the true heart of west Paris, stands in the center of the square posthumously named after Charles de Gaulle, at the junction of the twelve avenues that form the star-shaped Étoile.

→ www.paris-arc-de-triomphe.fr/en

5. LEGENDARY DEPARTMENT STORES

The nineteenth century, devoted to commerce, gave rise to these famous Parisian emporiums known as *grands magasins*.

Jules Jaluzot, a humble salesperson at Aristide Boucicaut's Bon Marché in the 1860s, had plenty of time to study how Paris's first department store functioned from the inside. His dream was to found his own temple to commerce, and the generous dowry of his wife helped him achieve his goal. In 1865, he established the store Au Printemps on Boulevard Haussmann, a symbol of Paris's transformation. It was an immediate success, partly explained by its proximity to the new Gare Saint-Lazare, a stone's throw from the construction site of the future Opéra. His commercial approach was inspired by the store La Samaritaine, owned by the Cognacq-Jay couple: browsers were welcome, stock was constantly renewed, prices were fixed, and profit margins were reduced. Following the model of the Grands Magasins du Louvre, Jaluzot installed elevators and electric lighting, and held regular sales. From 1912, Au Printemps was joined on Boulevard Haussmann by another "high-end bazaar," Galeries Lafayette (see photo below), whose range was intended to "turn customers' heads." Its neo-Byzantine cupola, looking down over the main store from a height of 140 feet (43 m), would become a symbol of the grand Parisian retailer.

→ www.printempsfrance.com (in French only) • haussmann.galerieslafayette.com/en



MUSÉE DU LOUVRE • 1ST ARR. / MUSÉE D'ORSAY • 7TH ARR. / CENTRE POMPIDOU • 4TH ARR.

6. LEGENDARY MUSEUMS

For lovers of culture, Paris is home to some of the most important art galleries and museums in the world.

The Louvre, Orsay, and Pompidou form the holy trinity of Parisian museums, allowing art lovers to explore every era of pictorial art through their extensive collections and exhibitions. First, there's the Louvre: once a royal residence of medieval origin, this vast palace was abandoned by Louis XIV to the artists and academies. The plan to install a museum in its rooms was conceived in the eighteenth century. After the arrest and execution of Louis XVI, in 1793 the revolutionary parliament founded the Muséum Central des Arts in the Louvre, which displayed masterpieces hitherto unseen by the general public. Continuously enriched over two centuries, the collections of this immense museum are viewed each year by more than ten million visitors who, since 1989, are welcomed beneath the entrance pyramid designed by I. M. Pei. On the opposite bank of the Seine stands the more modest Musée d'Orsay (see photo above), which is dedicated to nineteenth-century art. Constructed originally as a railway station, the building was Victor Laloux's contribution to the 1900 World's Fair. Its treasure trove of impressionist paintings, in particular, is beyond compare. For twentieth-century art, head to the Centre Georges Pompidou, with its controversial tubular architecture by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers—it's an essential stop for all enthusiasts of modern and contemporary art.

→ www.louvre.fr/en • www.musee-orsay.fr/en • www.centrepompidou.fr/en



8 BOULEVARD DE MÉNILMONTANT • 20TH ARRONDISSEMENT

7. PÈRE LACHAISE CEMETERY

The largest cemetery in the capital, Père Lachaise contains the graves of Paris's crème de la crème.

The creation of this necropolis—named after a famous Jesuit, Louis XIV's confessor—was part of a series of public hygiene measures begun at the end of the eighteenth century to clean up the capital, which also gave rise to the famous catacombs. The city purchased 67 square miles (17,000 ha.) of parkland from the Jesuits to establish a cemetery. The first burial took place on May 21, 1804. But the original intentions of urban planner Nicolas Frochot were thwarted: Parisians did not rush to come and bury their loved ones in this unknown garden of remembrance, at that time far from the city center and built on a sloping site. The first year of business saw only fourteen burials; the following years, not many more. The authorities had to take action. Desperate times call for desperate measures: with great pomp, the mortal remains of several prestigious figures were transferred to the Père Lachaise cemetery, including those of Molière and Jean de La Fontaine. This initiative was a great success, and began the profusion of famous tombs, including those of Honoré de Balzac, Frédéric Chopin, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Édith Piaf, and Jim Morrison, though the resulting crowds of tourists are not always conducive to contemplation.

→ pere-lachaise.com/en

PLACE DE L'OPÉRA • 9TH ARRONDISSEMENT

8. OPÉRA GARNIER

This sumptuous opera house—an icon of the Second Empire—took fourteen years to complete.

On May 30, 1860, Charles Garnier, a little-known thirty-five-year-old architect, was unanimously chosen by the jury of the international competition to build the new Paris opera house. Demonstrating the importance of this project to them, Napoleon III and his wife visited the building site in person. Empress Eugénie, amazed by what she saw, asked what style the architect had chosen—Louis XIV, Louis XV, or Louis XVI? Garnier replied airily, “All those mentioned by Your Majesty have had their day. This is Napoleon III style.” Employing the best artists and artisans of the time, including marble workers, gilders, mosaicists, painters, and sculptors, the young designer conceived a monumental façade, lavish salons, and a grand staircase as spectacular as the auditorium itself, requiring thirty types of marble. The new Opéra was designed to showcase the spectators in and around the auditorium, as much as—or possibly even more than—the performance taking place on stage. However, on January 5, 1875, when the Académie National de Musique was inaugurated by the new republican regime, Charles Garnier—doubtless considered too close to the deposed emperor—was not even invited to the gala evening. He had to purchase his own entrance ticket to his masterpiece.

→ www.operadeparis.fr/en



9. CATACOMBS

Descend into the antechamber of the underworld for an exhilarating experience.

On the morning of May 30, 1780, a man named Gravelot, who lived on Rue des Lingères, near the present Forum des Halles, found his cellar full of skulls, tibias, and other bones. The stench of this ossuary was so bad that the poor man almost fainted. Holy Innocents' Cemetery, adjoining his house, had effectively overflowed during the night. The overuse of the capital's cemeteries had long polluted Parisians' lives; Gravelot's misfortune persuaded the authorities to act. In 1785, a decree ordained that corpses be removed from the cemeteries within the city walls. This remarkable "relocation," which was begun during Louis XVI's reign and completed under Louis XVIII, was carried out discreetly, predominantly at night. The new location—at that time outside the capital—was the former quarry of Tombe-Issoire, beneath the plain of Montrouge, which had been worked since at least the fifteenth century, before being abandoned. Its huge chambers are the most surprising part of the labyrinth that stretches about 3 square miles (800 ha.) beneath the city. Nowadays, the ossuary continues to attract crowds of visitors who are surprised, astounded, and somewhat fascinated to discover, deep underground, millions of skulls and bones artfully arranged to create a decor that is both macabre and inventive.

→ www.catacombes.paris.fr/en



10. SACRÉ-COEUR BASILICA

Perched atop the Butte Montmartre, this immense neo-Byzantine basilica seems like something from another world.

In September 1870, France was reeling after a series of misfortunes. The Franco-Prussian war had been lost at Sedan and Napoleon III, unwell and vanquished, held captive. His empire collapsed. Parisians, besieged and starving, started to hunt and cook rats to survive. Two Parisian Catholics, Legentil and Rohault de Fleury, vowed—once peace was restored—to build a sanctuary in Paris, dedicated to “the Sacred Heart [Sacré Coeur] of Jesus.” It would be an act of “penitence, trust, hope, and faith.” The archbishop of Paris supported their plan; to atone for recent abuses, he chose Montmartre as the site for this church intended to serve the public. Needless to say, the district underwent a transformation: the shacks, dance halls, and little gardens that previously dominated the area had to make way for an extraordinary construction site, financed in large part by donations raised by national subscription. This unique building project, officially begun in 1875, would only be completed half a century later. The neo-Byzantine style chosen was controversial. As for the building's immaculate whiteness, it is due to a type of stone known as Château-Landon, extracted from the Souppes quarry in Seine-et-Marne, which has the unusual quality of bleaching in the rain.

→ www.sacre-coeur-montmartre.com/english

OTHER KEY SIGHTS IN PARIS

TUILERIES GARDENS

1st arrondissement
[www.louvre.fr/en/departments/
carrousel-tuileries-gardens](http://www.louvre.fr/en/departments/carrousel-tuileries-gardens)

SYNAGOGUE DES TOURNELLES

4th arrondissement
synatournelles.fr/index.php/en-us

GRANDE MOSQUÉE DE PARIS

5th arrondissement
www.mosqueedeparis.net (in French only)

MUSÉUM NATIONAL D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE

5th arrondissement
www.mnhn.fr/en

EIFFEL TOWER

7th arrondissement
www.tou Eiffel.paris/en

MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY-JACQUES CHIRAC

7th arrondissement
www.quaibrany.fr/en

PARC MONCEAU

8th arrondissement
www.paris.fr/equipements/parc-monceau-1804
(in French only)

SAINT-ALEXANDRE-NEVSKY CATHEDRAL

8th arrondissement
www.cathedrale-orthodoxe.com
(in French only)

CITÉ DE L'ARCHITECTURE ET DU PATRIMOINE

16th arrondissement
www.citedelarchitecture.fr/en

See also: en.parisinfo.com

Right: Eiffel Tower.

