

architecture AND HERITAGE



The splendour of Paris's monuments and the diversity of its architecture are a source of constant fascination. Centuries of magnificent works have left masterpieces like the Louvre palace, the cathedral of Notre-Dame, the Eiffel Tower and the basilica of Sacré-Cœur. But in addition to these legendary sites, the capital offers an incomparable historical treasure trove for visitors, who only have to look around them ... or peep through gates into the former carriage courtyards of *hôtels particuliers*.

The city unveils its treasures in palaces, splendid town houses, churches and chapels, the metro, covered arcades, train stations, warehouses and industrial wasteland. Even certain street numbers or plaques merit a look. From the remains of Lutèce (the city's first name in Roman times) to the great contemporary projects of today, each era has left its special mark. To discover this wonderful heritage, a good pair of shoes is recommended together with a map of Paris, insatiable curiosity and, why not the insight of a guide. Did you know, for example, that at night, one can stroll through "phantom", that is disused, metro stations?

The metro

The Métropolitain was inaugurated at the Exposition Universelle of 1900 and linked its major sites. Designed by the engineer Fulgence Bienvenüe, it was Hector Guimard who designed the 84 art nouveau entrances, two of which still exist at the Abbesses and Porte-Dauphine metro stations. White earthenware tiles and sculpted frames are the hallmark of the Parisian metro. Over the years, the metro has accumulated works of art: the Kiosque des Noctambules by Othoniel, in place Colette (the entrance to the Palais-Royal – Musée-du-Louvre) metro station; the Constitution written on the walls on the platforms of Concorde metro station; a revolutionary fresco at Bastille; the Nautilus submarine as seen by Jules Verne at Arts-et-Métiers; the history of the 20th century in pictures at Tuileries, and more.

Train stations

In the 19th century the railway was "the" definitive symbol of modern times and the train station its temple. Built in 1851, then rebuilt thirty years later, Saint-Lazare, with its metal structure and glass roofs – avant-gardist in their time-

inspired artists. The Orsay train station (today a magnificent museum) was inaugurated for the Exposition Universelle of 1900. The Lyon train station was given a new makeover for the same occasion; the prestige of the train, a new way of travel, is still apparent in the luxurious salons of its restaurant Le Train Bleu. The train stations are the gateways of Paris. They bore witness to the first departures of paid holidays and saw the arrival of the first troops back from the front in times of war; they saw the arrival of inhabitants from the Alsace, the Auvergne, and Brittany, who came to seek work as servants or building workers, or even open brasseries. These places, charged with history and endowed with architectural splendours and the latest technology, are well worth a visit!

Private mansions (*hôtels particuliers*)

One has to go back to the Middle Ages to find the origins of the Parisian "hôtel". The residence of a powerful lord or rich bourgeois was set around an interior courtyard. In the 16th century the U-shaped plan became the fashion: a main building, looking on to both the courtyard and the garden, was

flanked by two wings. In the 17th century, the model spread to the Marais and the faubourgs Saint-Germain and Saint-Honoré, giving rise to wonderful architectural mansions. Although the hôtels Biron, Carnavalet, de Cluny, Dassault, Matignon, Salomon de Rothschild and de Sully are the most well-known, there are countless others to be discovered as you walk around.

Squares

Designed for gatherings and celebrations, the “places” (squares), of royal or republican origin, are highly symbolic places. Their layout was artfully thought out to glorify the statue of a king or the emblem of power erected at their centre. Place Dauphine was thus linked to Henri IV, place des Vosges to Louis XIII, and place des Victoires to Louis XIV.

EVENT

European Heritage Days (Journées européennes du Patrimoine)

Each year, on the 3rd weekend in September (18 and 19 September 2010), public and private buildings open exceptionally for this occasion. In Paris, you can visit the Élysée Palace (the official residence of the French president), the Sénat (the upper house of the French parliament), certain ministries and embassies, city halls, the backstage of theatres, hospitals, villas and more. Visits to public heritage sites are free, private sites often charge a reduced fee.

NUIT DES MUSÉES (MUSEUM NIGHT)

On 15 May 2010, for the 6th consecutive year, this event of European dimensions enabled an ever greater number of visitors to visit Parisian museums for free, between 6pm and midnight. The secret of its success? It is free, it is night time, but above all it is the opportunity for chance encounters in museums discovered in the moonlight. Establishments vie with each other for unusual ideas, searching their collections to present a rich programme of special events around the annual theme. For visitors who have not yet explored Museum Night, come along to the 7th edition in May 2011.

Louis XV was replaced in place Vendôme by the column of Napoléon, and dethroned at Concorde by the obelisk of Louis-Philippe. As their names indicate, the place de la Bastille, place de la République and place de la Nation seek rather to exalt revolutions and values of citizenship.

Historic streets

How many streets of Paris have witnessed major events? Their name or commemorative plaques keep history alive. So, boulevard Saint-Germain is inextricably linked to May 68, just like the Champs-Élysées is to the jubilation of the Liberation of Paris. The boulevard “des grands magasins” (of major department stores) bears the name of Baron Haussmann, who transformed the capital in the 19th century with wide avenues. Sometimes, small streets have their story to tell. In May 1610, the carriage of Henri IV entered

the small street de la Ferronnerie, which was narrow and full of stalls. The royal equipage had to slow down and Ravaillac took advantage of the occasion to stab the king who died on his return to the Louvre. To relive these great historical moments consult the brown plaques that relate these fascinating episodes of the history of Paris in the places that they actually happened.

Street furniture

The stamp placed on the Parisian landscape by Haussmann and Guimard is quite familiar. However, it is the architect Davioud who gave the city its street furniture, be it functional or decorative and which still characterizes the capital today. The circular cast-iron frameworks that encircle trees are identical to those created at the time of the Second Empire. Some lamp posts, lanterns and double benches, as well as the Morris columns (where the programme of shows are displayed) and the Wallace fountains also date from this period.

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