



Michael Eustace Erwin

Licensed tour guide
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Rather than a tour, what I should like to offer is a conversation with a place: free-flowing, open-ended, based on mutual interest. It is not speed-dating monuments, nor is it a death march or a mind-numbing lecture. The purpose of the guide is to help you discover—using accurate and factual knowledge—the insights and perceptions that will add richness, relevance and colour to your experience.

I am a native English speaker with a degree in Art History from the École du Louvre and a master's degree in Art History from the Sorbonne. I grew up in the United States, England, Switzerland and France, so I am attuned to everyday cultural differences. If you intend driving in France for the first time, at some point learning how to handle an intersection may be more important than understanding the structure of the Gothic flying buttress ; I'd like to help you with both.

Below are suggestions for visits in and around Paris. Because of my training, I tend to focus on monuments and museums, but my interests are wide-ranging and I am happy to explore new themes in keeping with what interests you. If time allows, you might even consider a day-trip to one of the lesser known provincial cities that can easily be reached by train : Rouen or Auxerre, for example. Other visits are in preparation.

I am registered with both the Château de Versailles to lead tours in the King's Private Apartments and with the Château de Chantilly to lead tours in the Duc d'Aumale's Private Apartments.

The Louvre Museum and Palace : A Ramble Through Western Civilization, a.k.a. It's Not Just About Mona Lisa!

Allow 3 to 4 hours, including time to stop and sit every now and again—Suitable for all ages from early teens and up ; the focus is on history and cultural history.

Rather than just a 'fine arts' museum full of old paintings by dead artists, the Louvre is a vast, life-sized encyclopaedia the collections of which span well over fifty centuries of Western Civilisation, starting with the first stirrings in the Fertile Crescent circa 5000 b.C. and going all the way up to the early 19th century : ceramics, sculpture, goldsmith's work, furniture, tapestries, etc. as well as paintings. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to wander through time and space to explore the diversity and the continuity of Western Civilisation : Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Greece, the Etruscans, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque and ending with the Neo-Classical periods. If this sounds too vast (and it is !) the visit can focus around a theme. Here are some that might serve : 'Female deities and intercessory figures from Ishtar to the Virgin Mary' — 'The art of ceramics from prehistoric Iran to 19th Century France' — 'Medium and Message : Communication as a visual art from Mesopotamian cylinder seals and Egyptian wall-paintings to Christian iconography and Baroque political propaganda' — 'Decorative arts of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries : jewellery, goldsmith's work, tapestry, furniture, and ceramics'. Or we'll invent one in-situ !

Learning Art Snobbery at the Louvre: Some Basic Concepts of Art Historical Analysis to Further Your Enjoyment and Impress Your Friends

Allow 3 to 4 hours—Suitable from mid-teens and up for anyone who feels inadequate reading an exhibition catalogue or puzzles over labels at an art gallery.

In Paris, we do intellectual snobbery particularly well... But we do it out of love for knowledge and exactness. This tour will approach painting, sculpture and decorative arts primarily as works of craftsmanship the better to understand the materials and physical techniques involved as well as taking in some of the more abstract and aesthetic principles such as composition, draughtsmanship, plasticity, the interplay of tradition and creativity and of course ,conservation and curatorial issues.

Glorious, Mediaeval Paris : The Sainte-Chapelle and the Cluny Museum

Allow approximately 4 hours, including an exterior tour of Notre-Dame and getting to the Cluny Museum—Suitable for just about everyone except infants in push-chairs because of spiral staircases

This tour includes the glorious 13th-century stained-glass windows of the *Sainte-Chapelle* (best seen in the morning),

a visit to the exterior of *Notre-Dame* and a visit of the *Musée national du Moyen-Âge Thermes de Cluny* which, aside from the famous *Lady with the Unicorn* tapestries, houses an important collection of mediaeval sculpture, ivories and goldsmith's work.

Saint-Denis : The Birthplace of Gothic Architecture and the Burial Place of Kings (from 600 a.D. to the Revolution)

Allow 3 to 4 hours including the time to get to the basilica by metro—Suitable for everyone, especially those with a keen interest in French history and/or Gothic architecture.

The basilica of Saint-Denis is located just outside the Paris city limits, to the north. It was the burial place of French kings from about 600 a.D. to the end of the monarchy in 1793. It is also where a new style of architecture was first executed on a grand scale in the early 12th century, subsequently spreading throughout Europe and retaining its influence until the present day ; it is what we—improperly—call the *Gothic Style*. This visit is the opportunity to delve into the very roots of France, starting at the fall of the Roman Empire and working up to the 18th century. It is extraordinary how much of modern French culture can still be understood only by understanding the country's formative years in the early Middle Ages.

If time allows, the visit also will include a visit to the Carmelite monastery with its beautiful 18th-century chapel, rebuilt for one of the daughters of King Louis XV.

Two Gems Transitioning into the Twentieth Century : The Musée Rodin and L'Orangerie

Allow approximately 4 hours, including the stroll between the museums—Suitable for just about everyone who loves Impressionist and early 20th-century art ; a must for lovers of Rodin and Monet

Auguste Rodin and Claude Monet were exact contemporaries, both born in 1840. Each in his own medium revolutionised the art of his time, Rodin in sculpture and Monet in painting. And each left a major testimony of his work to the care of the French people : Rodin left his entire estate which is now the Rodin Museum; Monet left two magnificent ellipses of *Nymphéas* (i.e. water-lilies) at the *Orangerie*, arranged in keeping with his instructions. The *Orangerie* also houses a medium-sized but significant collection of early 20th-century art : Picasso, Rousseau, Soutine, Laurencin, Derain, etc. This tour is designed as an opportunity to enjoy the pleasant, human scale of both museums whilst feasting one's eyes on the works of two great artists, as well as that of those whose vision of art they so profoundly changed.

Versailles : The Palaces and the Gardens

Allow for a full day because if you're going to make the effort to go there, you may as well do it right, which includes taking time for lunch and a rest. Versailles deserves it and so do you!—Suitable for just about everyone, but please note that there is a fair amount of walking.

The palace at Versailles was built for King Louis XIV and was the principal residence of his successors until the Revolution of 1789. As such, the palace as showcase of French power and magnificence grew into an extraordinary complex of formal gardens with statuary and fountains to which were added two smaller palaces and a whole other set of gardens. It is a pity to try and squeeze this visit into a half-day as so many people do, and it is a crying shame not limit oneself to the State Apartments without also visiting the Private Apartments. Making a full day of it allows one not only to enjoy a thorough visit of the grandiose main palace, but also—at a civilised pace—to take in the smaller *Grand* and *Petit Trianon* palaces, the great formal gardens of Louis XIV and the no-less magnificent, faux-peasant gardens laid out for Queen Marie-Antoinette.

General information and disclaimers about the tours

The tours listed are defined as full-day or half-day. A half-day tour is up to four hours ; a full-day tour means up to four hours in the morning and up to four hours in the afternoon, with a one-hour break in between.

Clients are responsible for their own transportation. The above tours rely either on walking or public transportation ; metro, train and/or bus tickets are not included. Clients or their agents are free to arrange other transportation, such as a car and driver, if they prefer, although the guide declines any participation in tours that include bicycles, segways or electric scooters in city streets.

Entrance fees and tickets are not included. If reservations are required, the expenses will be engaged by the guide and it is understood that once engaged these are non-refundable and owed to the guide, even if the tour participants cancel their tour.

If for reasons beyond the guide's control the museum or monument for the tour is unexpectedly closed to the public (in the event of a strike, a security alert, a visiting dignitary, etc.) an alternative tour will be improvised on the spot and this will be deemed an appropriate compensation for the tour that could not proceed.

As the tours are conducted in public areas (museums, monuments, streets, etc.) the guide assumes no responsibility or liability for any accidents or mishaps that may occur (slipping, tripping, falling, pickpockets, traffic accidents, etc.) that are not directly caused by the guide.