

## Visiting Chateaux and Castles in France

Contributed by Martyn Davis  
Tuesday, 29 July 2008

With numerous chateaux and castles all over France, it can become a problem to decide on what are to go to, like the Loire region with fabulous castles such as the Chateau Chenonceau, or Paris in the Ile de France region.

France is well known for its numerous chateaus and castles and one of the main areas that people think of is the Loire region with fabulous castles such as the Chateau Chenonceau, but what many people do not realize is that there are lots of different palaces and chateaux that surround the capital city of Paris in the Ile de France region.

However, probably the most well known of all of these historical buildings in France is the Chateau de Versailles that is situated just outside of Paris and these types of chateau are on such a grand scale that you really need to put a whole day to one side to appreciate them to the fullest.

In fact, the Chateau de Versailles is one of the largest castles in the world and is one of the most visited sites in France with its French architecture on a grand scale. Plus Versailles has history galleries with many masterpieces and is the largest history museum in the world, but this is only one part of the chateau open to the public!

Yet one of the most famous rooms at the former Royal Palace is the 75m long Galerie des Glaces, known as the Hall of Mirrors and this is where the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, which signified the end of World War I.

But the gardens that were designed by Andre Le Notre, have also become the most famous in world and there are around 1,300 fountains, jets and waterfalls that utilize water pumped from the River Seine, a vast amount of sculptures and statues, plus the formal gardens to explore. And at a weekend from April through to September there are fountain shows for everyone enjoyment.

There is also another show held at Chateau de Versailles at set times called the Académie du Spectacle Equestre, plus you can visit the restored 17th century royal stables, home to these beautiful horses that are the stars of the show.

But enough on this palace, lets take a quick look at another beautiful castle in France, called Chateau de Chantilly, which can be located in one of the largest forests near Paris and this vast estate covers around 7,800 hectares, yet is not as well known as the Chateau Versailles.

Now, anyone you know that has enjoyed The Louvre, will love the museum of historical paintings at Chateau Chantilly, as it is classed as one of the finest museums in France and the only one except The Louvre that has 3 Raphael paintings.

And also inside Chateau de Chantilly is the Conde Museum that holds a book room containing about 30,000 volumes, including 1,500 manuscripts and is the most important collection in France, plus this castle also contains medieval manuscripts with one very rare specimen dating from the 11th century.

Andre Le Notre also designed the gardens at Chateau De Chantilly and this castle has the largest expanse of water with the Grand Canal being approximately 2.5 kilometres long, but yet another garden that Andre designed is to be found at the Chateau Vaux le Vicomte.

You can even hire an electric golf car to get around the grounds or take a trip on the canal when visiting the well restored Chateau Vaux le Vicomte and this French castle has a horse driven carriage museum, which houses a unique collection of 18th and 19th century carriages, plus an exhibition dedicated to Andre Le Notre in the vaulted cellars.

They even hold candlelight visits, specific themed activities for children and from March until to October there is a fountain show held twice a month, which is a spectacular sight, especially when you consider that the fountains are still gravity fed the same way as they were in the 17th century!

Whatever French castle you choose to visit, you will not be disappointed and other stately homes around Paris that all have something different to offer include the Royal Chateau de Fontainebleau where you can feed large carp and have a tour of the estate in a horse-drawn carriage or the Chateau de Sceaux where they hold classical music festivals and outdoor operas in the summer.

The Chateau de Compiègne is another restored castle that has three different museums including the museum of transport, which shows exhibits of past road travel from bicycles right through to the first electric and steam engine vehicles, prototypes and some very rare items on display.

Yet the Chateau de Thoiry is definitely a fantastic and fun day out for all the family with something for everyone including the youngest to enjoy and is home to what was the very first wild animal safari park in Europe. It also has the only interactive maze in the world! Plus you can also have a tour of the castle by guides in period costumes and see the unique solar calendar in the garden where the Chateau itself becomes transparent during solstice

So why not take a trip out to one of these incredible architectural wonders and have a day to remember with a picnic in the grounds. Just make sure you pick a dry day to make the most of it, but please do remember that most of these chateaux and castles close at least one day a week, which is normally on a Monday or Tuesday!

About the Author:

[www.placesinfrance.com](http://www.placesinfrance.com)

Martyn Davis European Traveler, Author, Photographer and Business Development Manager, For all your French holiday needs and travel guide to France, with tourist information, landmarks and attractions - French Castles and Chateau in France