

France

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Introduction

Here are pictures from my visit to France.

On this leg of my vacation I was participating as photographer for a new tour operated by Astrid Baur and her European Castles Tours travel company: *French Castles Tour – Châteaux of Paris and the Loire Valley*.

Pictures from my visit to England are in a separate file.

The pictures here are in chronological order, the way the tour unfolded.

You will be able to tell that there were many dull and cloudy days.

These pictures are assembled for friends and tour participants who have wildly varying degrees of familiarity and interest in the areas visited. You will probably find there's more detail than interests you in some sections. When that happens, page through quickly.

Hope you enjoy.

- Tour Destination
- Accommodation
- Regional City



France

I had some free time in Paris for informal sightseeing before Astrid Baur's *French Castles Tour* began.

Her French tour begins in Paris with visits to major attractions such as the Eiffel Tower.

It then visits Versailles, the most famous palace in the world, just outside Paris.

And then the tour moves south to the valley of the Loire River, to a home base at Céré la Ronde.

From there day trips fan out to the castles and palaces of the Loire Valley.



Paris

Welcome to Paris, an important settlement for over 2,000 years that has grown into a city with a metro population of about 12 million.



Paris

Tim, a long-time friend from Toronto, is joining the Castles tour, speaks French, knows Paris, and has planned some informal pre-tour sightseeing.



Paris

We start off in the Luxembourg Garden, the largest park in Paris. It contains over a hundred statues and fountains. But what's with that crane in background?



Paris

It's hanging the world's largest disco ball, in preparation for the *La Nuit Blanche* festivities that will take place tonight.



Paris

The Medici Fountain was built in 1630 for Marie de' Medici, widow of King Henry IV, by a fountain maker and engineer from Florence.



Paris

The Pantheon, further east in the Latin Quarter, was built between 1758 and 1789. It is the burial place for the famous, including Voltaire and Rousseau.



Paris

The Saint-Étienne-du-Mont church near the Pantheon contains the shrine of St. Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris.



Paris

Many streets in the Latin Quarter, the university district, are narrow and lined with small cafés.



Paris

Saturday morning shopping.



Paris

Only desserts in this shop.



Paris

Jim Morrison's grave site in Montparnasse Cemetery.



Eiffel Tower

Castles Tour sightseeing starts at the Eiffel Tower, built as the entrance arch for the 1889 World's Fair, and now the universal emblem for Paris.



Eiffel Tower

The tower is huge by any standard. It stands 1,063 feet / 324 metres tall, and is 410 feet / 125 metres wide at the base.



**Eiffel
Tower**

Astrid Baur, centre with her trademark orange shoulder bag, has arranged tickets for us to ride the elevators up the tower.



Eiffel Tower

**Some are on their way to the top, the height of an 81-storey building.
The middle level is great for photographing the tower's surroundings.**



**Eiffel
Tower**

Looking south-west: The Grenelle and other bridges across the Seine River.



Eiffel
Tower

North-West: The Trocadéro Gardens, surrounded by a cluster of national museums.



**Eiffel
Tower**

North: The Arc de Triomphe at the western end of the Champs Élysées, honouring those who have fought for France.



**Eiffel
Tower**

North-east: The Seine runs through the centre of Paris.
The Left (south) Bank is on the right.



**Eiffel
Tower**

North-east: Cruises on the Seine are a great way to see many of the most interesting sights in Paris.



**Eiffel
Tower**

North-east: The domed Basilica of the Sacré Coeur dominates the hill in the Montmartre district, home to famous artists including Dali, Monet, and Picasso.



**Eiffel
Tower**

East, from left: The twin towers of Notre Dame Cathedral, the gilded dome of Les Invalides where Napoleon is buried, and the dome of the Parthenon.



**Eiffel
Tower**

South-east: The Champ de Mars park stretches from the base of the tower towards Montparnasse in the distance.



Versailles

Louis XIV transformed his father's hunting lodge into the Palace of Versailles starting in 1669. It became and remains the ultimate in ostentatious palaces.



Versailles

Louis XIV, known as “The Sun King”, created Versailles as a physical demonstration of his absolute power as monarch.



Versailles

In 1682 Louis XIV moved himself and the French court to Versailles as part of his strategy to establish centralized power and control.



Versailles

France was governed from Versailles from 1682 until the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789.



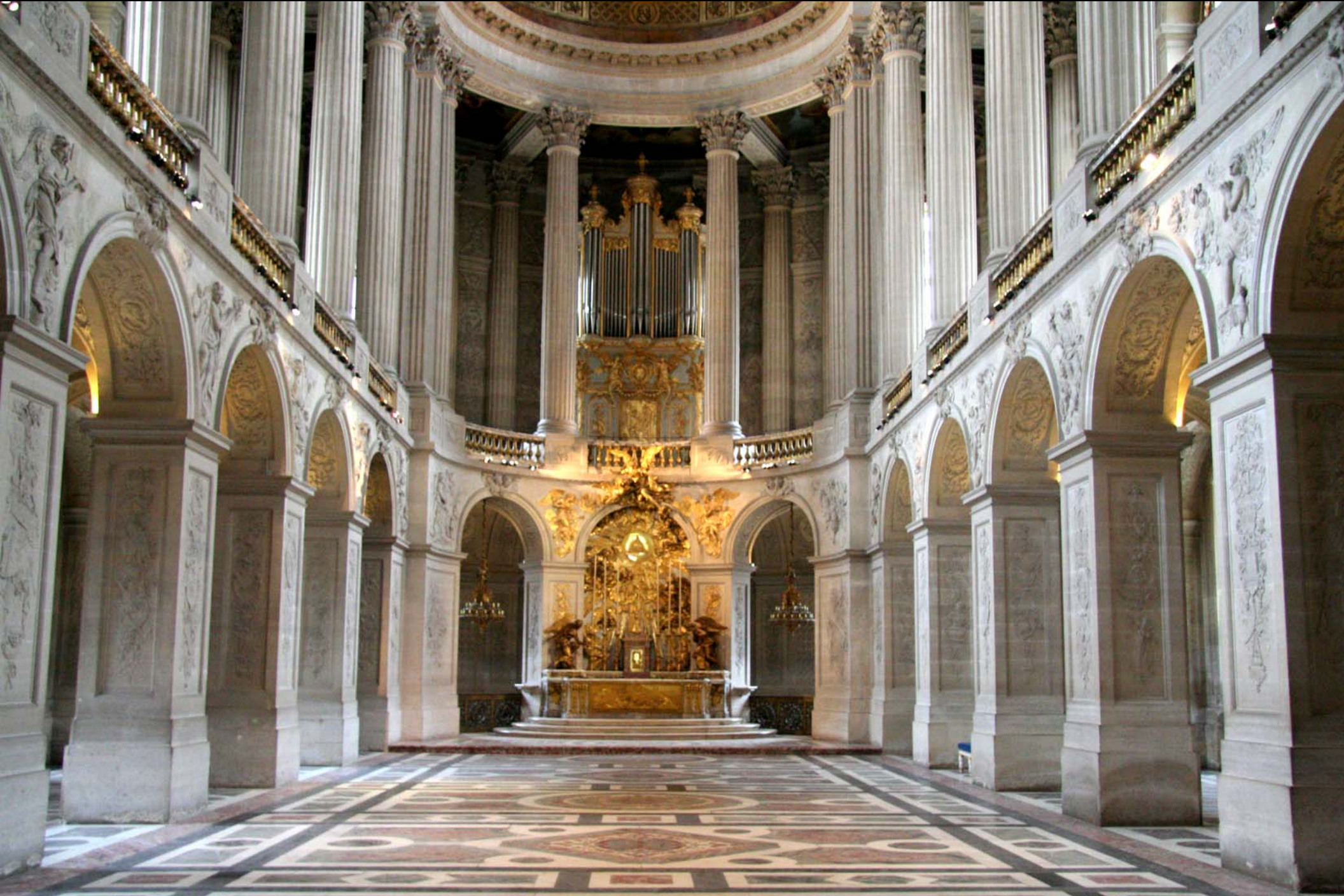
Versailles

The Hall of Mirrors, the setting for many Court ceremonies during Louis' reign, is the most famous room in Versailles, and has inspired copies throughout the world.



Versailles

The Hall of Mirrors.



Versailles

The Chapel of Versailles, consecrated to Saint Louis (Louis IX of France), was begun in 1689 and completed in 1708.



Versailles

The ceiling of the nave is *God the Father in His Glory* by Antoine Coypel.
The half-dome of the apse is *The Resurrection of Christ* by Charles de la Fosse.



Versailles

Salon de Mercure (Mercury), used for varying functions over the years.



Versailles

The Orangerie Garden. The orange trees, set out in boxes from May to October, are moved inside for the winter.



Versailles

Pyramid garden.



Versailles

Back gardens.



Versailles

The Latona Fountain, a wedding-cake style fountain, with a statue of the goddess Latona and her children, Apollo and Diana.

- Tour Destination
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France

The tour moves south from Paris and Versailles.

We make a short stop in Orléans for lunch.

And then press on to our new home base, Le Château de Razay at Céré la Ronde.

From there day trips fan out to the castles and palaces of the beautiful Loire Valley.



Orléans

Orléans is a city of about 115,000 situated where the Loire River bends and turns south-west.



Orléans

Orléans features an interesting blend of traditional ...



Orléans

... and modern architecture.



Orléans

The town square features a statue of Joan of Arc, "The Maid of Orléans", who led the liberation of the town from the English in 1429.



Château de Razay

The Château de Razay near Céré la Ronde was built at the end of the 15th century for an Italian aristocrat, but it's our home for the next four nights.



**Château
de Razay**

The château is surrounded by 85 acres / 35 hectares of grounds and woodlands, and there is an eclectic assortment of wildlife to entertain us.



**Château
de Razay**

The château is historic, but it also boasts modern conveniences ...



**Château
de Razay**

... and a pleasant backyard patio.



**Château
de Razay**

Just the place for the gang to relax after a busy day.



Chenonceau

The Château de Chenonceau gracefully spans the Cher River and is considered by many to be the most elegant of the French châteaux.



Chenonceau

Chenonceau is known as the “Ladies Castle”. Over a period of 400 years it was shaped by women – by a succession of royal mistresses and wives.



Chenonceau

The current manor was designed by the French Renaissance architect Philibert Delorme and built between 1515 and 1521.



Chenonceau

The château is surrounded by a series of exquisite formal gardens. Chenonceau is the second most visited palace in France, after Versailles.



Chenonceau

Bedchamber of Diane de Poitiers, mistress of Henry II
and first First Lady of the château as of 1547.



Chenonceau

The Five Queens' Bedroom, named for the daughters and daughters-in-law of Catherine de' Medici, the second but not last First Lady of the château.



Chenonceau

Louise of Lorraine's bedroom. Because of the succession of mistresses and wives with differing tastes, most of the rooms in the chateau seem to be bedrooms.



Chenonceau

Diane de Poitiers' elaborate garden, the first at Chenonceau.
It is protected from the Cher River by walls and elevated terraces.



Chenonceau

Catherine de' Medici's exquisite garden on the other side of the château.
Not meant to be competitive at all.



Chenonceau

The Tour des Marques is all that remains of the fortified castle demolished to make way for the current château.



Chenonceau

The Chancellery was built in the 16th century for the house steward of the estate.



Chenonceau

Fresh flowers are grown in the Farm Garden to decorate the rooms of the château.



Amboise

Amboise is a small and pleasant market town on the banks of the Loire River that was once home to the French court.



Amboise Castle

Amboise Castle was constructed on a promontory overlooking the Loire River in the 11th century.



**Amboise
Castle**

The castle's position gives it a commanding view of the Loire and control over a strategic part of the river.



Amboise Castle

The castle was seized by Charles II in 1434 and for over a century it was a favourite residence of French kings.



Amboise Castle

The château was damaged during the French Revolution and again during WW II. Today's visitor sees about a fifth of what Amboise once was.



**Amboise
Castle**

The St. Hubert Chapel on a terrace inside Amboise Castle is reputed to be the burial place of Leonardo da Vinci.



Clos Lucé

Beginning in 1516 Leonardo da Vinci lived and worked at the Clos Lucé mansion near Amboise Castle as the guest of King Francis I. He died there in 1519.



Clos Lucé

The interior of the mansion and the grounds display 40 models of Leonardo's machine and concept designs.



Clos Lucé

The Clos Lucé château is surrounded by a
20 acre / 8 hectare cultural and nature park.



Cheverny

The symmetric design and grandeur of the facade of the Château de Cheverny are characteristic features of the period of Henry IV and Louis XIII.



Cheverny

Cheverny was built by Philippe Hurault between 1624 and 1630. After several ownership changes the Hurault family bought the château back in 1825.



Cheverny

The Dining Room is lined with 34 wooden panels illustrating the Spanish novel *Don Quixote*.



Cheverny

The Bridal Chamber, with a Louis XVI dressing table



Cheverny

The Nursery, with rocking horses from the time of Napoleon III



Cheverny

The Arms Room displays a collection of weapons from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.



Blois Castle

The Royal Château de Blois was built on a steep hill in the middle of the town of Blois in stages from the 13th to the 17th century.



Blois Castle

The château overlooks the town and the Loire River and became the favourite royal residence and the political capital of the kingdom under King Louis XII.



Blois Castle

The interior of the wing added by Louis XII at the beginning of the 1500s, with the chapel to the right.



Blois Castle

A mounted statue of the king adorns the facade of the Louis XII wing.



Blois Castle

The King's Bedchamber. The Duke of Guise was murdered in this room in 1588 by eight assassins acting on the orders of King Henri II.



Blois Castle

The Queen's Bedchamber. Catherine de' Medici, wife of Henry II of France, passed away here in 1589.



Chambord

The royal Château de Chambord is one of the most recognizable châteaux in the world because of its very distinctive French Renaissance architecture.



Chambord

Chambord is the largest castle in the Loire Valley. It was built by King François I, who lived in Blois and Amboise, only as a hunting lodge and to be near to his mistress.



Chambord

Construction of Chambord began in 1519 and continued with interruptions until 1547. The fortified walls, towers, and partial moat are purely decorative.



Chambord

The French Castles Tour 2009 group poses for its class picture at Chambord.



Chambord

The roofscape of Chambord, intended to look like the skyline of Constantinople, includes eleven kinds of towers and three types of chimneys, without symmetry.



Azay-le-Rideau The Azay-le-Rideau Château was built from 1515 to 1527 on an island in the Indre River. Its foundations rise straight out of the water.



Azay-le-Rideau Azay-le-Rideau was one of the earliest French Renaissance châteaux. It was built by the secretary to King François I to signify his noble rank.



Azay-le-Rideau

In 1791 the Marquis de Biencourt purchased the estate, restored the château, and added English gardens and a vast park – before falling on hard times.



Azay-le-Rideau The French government bought the estate in 1905, restored the château again, and refurbished the interior with a collection of Renaissance pieces.



Azay-le-Rideau Study in Château Azay-le-Rideau



Azay-le-Rideau Bedchamber in Château Azay-le-Rideau



Villandry

The Château de Villandry was one of the last Renaissance palaces built on the Loire. Villandry is a 14th century castle keep surrounded by a 16th century château.



Villandry

Villandry's international fame is based not on the château but on its extensive and exquisite gardens.



Villandry

The inside rooms of the Château de Villandry were refitted in the 18th century.



Villandry

Dining Room of Château de Villandry



Villandry

During the 20th century Joachim Carvallo used historical sources and archaeological surveys to restore the gardens to their Renaissance glory.



Villandry

Each year 250,000 flowers and vegetables are planted in the gardens, half of them prepared in the château's own glasshouses.



Villandry

The gardens include a water garden, ornamental flower gardens, and vegetable gardens. They are laid out in formal patterns created with low box hedges.



Villandry

The kitchen garden (cabbages here) link back to the abbeys of the Middle Ages. The rose bushes symbolize the monks digging in their individual squares.



Tours

On our last day we make a brief stop in Tours, largest city in the Valley. 15th century timber-framed houses surround Place Plumereau, once the town marketplace.



Farewell

Farewell dinner in Montrichard at the end of a magnifique tour.

< End >

France