

# FIVE OF THE BEST HERITAGE SITES OUTSIDE OF PARIS



There is no need to promote the wonders of central Paris to foreign or domestic tourists, not when visitor numbers continue to amaze and earn the city the title of most popular destination in the world; there is, however, a good case for promoting those forgotten gems on the outskirts of the city. There are cultural heritage sites that mean so much to the history of the nation but are easily overshadowed by the Eiffel Tower, Louvre, Notre-Dame Cathedral and other big draws, many of which were undoubtedly seen by the 32.3 million visiting for 2013's City Of Light. Here, Tourism Review hopes to shine a light on the top five heritage sites outside of Paris to showcase the beauty and history beyond the city limits.

## The Medieval Town of Provins

The first of these less-conventional tourist destinations is a town that cherishes its medieval history and displays it with remarkable preservation. Provins is less than an hour away from Paris but its desire to hold on to its purpose as a Middle Ages trading hub means it is nothing like its close neighbour. This fortified town was once part of the territory of the Counts of Champagne and it was their powerful rule that helped turn the market place into a vital destination for traders from across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and the ideal host for international fairs. As Provins developed, its citizens held onto its original structure, recognising the significance of the markets and fairs and creating a town with a unique hybrid of styles worthy of Unesco's honours.

## The Palace of Fontainebleau

This palace is not the most well-known of regal residences in France but it is still a stunning historical site that is respected for both its impact on architectural history and the significance of its full estate. It is easy for contemporary tourists to lose themselves in the wonders of Fontainebleau's interior and the eight centuries of French history that the décor represents, with the building showcasing a range of architectural styles for each former owner and a diverse selection of artwork and decorative touches on the floors, walls and ceilings; however, visitors should not overlook the grounds. The park and gardens, which are now classed as a World Heritage Site, were also embellished and extended with each new ruler to transform the prized 12th century hunting lodge into a fashionable retreat for the Royal Court.

## The Chartres Cathedral

This stunning time capsule of a cathedral is viewed by many as the perfect example of its type and a key religious venue because of its place in the heart of French pilgrims. The Notre Dame de Chartres Cathedral, to give it its full name, is a gothic structure that brilliantly symbolises the styles of the 12th and 13th centuries, through its use of sculpture and stained glass, and presents them to modern day tourists with such perfect preservation that there is no hint of age or decay from the hundreds of years that have passed. The cathedral was rebuilt in just 26 years following a fire in 1194 and it became a focal point for medieval Christianity, with pilgrims drawn to its giant, 112 metre bell tower from miles around.

## **The Palace of Versailles**

While the examples mentioned above may be unknown to many prospective travellers, the Palace of Versailles is one of the most famous, historical residences in the country with countless delights for tourists. Best known as the home of Louis XIV, the importance of the palace goes beyond this ruler to his father, Louis XIII, who built it in 1624, and his wife Marie Antoinette, whose estate lay within the grounds. Versailles is viewed as the scene of a large part of 17th and 18th century French history and this can be uncovered by exploring the buildings designed by Louis Le Vau and the canal, gardens and parkland of the grounds, the extent of which further accentuates the opulence and majesty of the residence and explains why they caused so much envy across Europe.

## **The Notre-Dame Cathedral of Reims**

The last addition to this list of important cultural heritage sites outside Paris is another cathedral but this one, along with the other religious buildings in the town, offers such an important connection to religion and the French monarchy that the area was made a World Heritage site based on this significance. The cathedral, the Basilique Saint Remi and the Palais du Tau combine to make up this unique heritage site but the cathedral stands out, historically and aesthetically, because of its role in coronations - with 32 sovereigns being awarded the throne within those hallowed walls - and the use of 13th century Gothic architecture, which has led to the building being called a masterpiece for the way it showcases these key styles and techniques.

Date: 2014-05-12

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/top-5-heritage-sites-around-paris-news4126>