

FRANCE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Louvre, Paris

Home to art's most photogenic beauties—the *Venus de Milo*, *the Winged Victory*, and the *Mona Lisa*—this is not only the largest palace in France but also the most important museum in the world.

Chartres, Ile-de-France

Triply famous for its peerless stained-glass windows, as the resting place for an important relic of the Virgin Mary, and as the birthplace of High Gothic, Chartres is more than a cathedral—it's a nondenominational spiritual experience.

Versailles, Ile-de-France

A palace and then some, this prime example of royals-gone-wild Baroque style served as backdrop for the rise to power of King Louis XIV. To escape all his bicep-flexing grandeur visit the park to see Marie-Antoinette's fairytale farm.

Monet's Garden, Giverny, Ile-de-France

A 8-acre "Monet," these lush gardens were works of art the Impressionist master spent years perfecting before he began re-creating them on canvas. The colors radiate best on sunny spring days.

Chenonceau, Loire Valley

Half-bridge, half-pleasure palace, this "queen of the châteaux" was presided over by six remarkable women. It was Catherine de' Medici who brilliantly enlarged it to span the River Cher in homage to the Ponte Vecchio of her native Florence.

Lyon, Rhône-Alps

The second largest city in France, Lyon vies with Paris as the country's true gastronomic capital—gourmands flock here for its galaxy of multistar superchefs and cozy bouchon taverns.

Mont-St-Michel, Normandy

Once seen, never forgotten, this Romanesque abbey rises from its bay like a shimmering apparition, becoming an island at high tide. French and English fought to dominate the "rock" until the 13th century, when it was crowned with a splendid Gothic church.

Strasbourg, Alsace-Lorraine

The cosmopolitan seat of Europe's Parliament, this fascinating mix of half-timber houses and modern glass buildings was fought over by France and Germany—a battle that resulted in a rich intertwining of cultures.

Beaune, Burgundy

At the heart of some of the world's most esteemed vineyards, this atmospheric town is inextricably linked with the wine trade, especially during the annual auction at Beaune's beautiful 15th-century Hôtel-Dieu.

Eze, the French Riviera

Spectacularly perched atop a rocky promontory, this watercolor-pretty village has some of the most breathtaking views this side of a NASA space capsule.

St-Tropez, the French Riviera

Singlehandedly propelled from sleepy hamlet to glamorous resort by Brigitte Bardot, St-Trop today heaves with crowds of petulant glitterati. Chill out in the quiet pastel-hued alleys of the La Ponche quarter.

Aix-en-Provence, Provence

With sun-dappled squares, luxuriant fountains, and Paul Cézanne's hallowed studio, this captivating town is just the spot for those who consider café-sitting, people-watching, and boutique shopping a way of life.