



The Louvre is the world's largest museum and houses one of the most impressive art collections in history. The magnificent, baroque-style palace and museum — LeMusée du Louvre in French — sits along the banks of the Seine River in Paris. It is one of the city's biggest tourist attractions.

The Louvre was originally built as a fortress in 1190, but was reconstructed in the 16th century to serve as a royal palace. "Like many buildings, it was built and rebuilt over the years," said Tea Gudek Snajdar, an Amsterdam-based art historian, museum docent and a blogger at Culture Tourist.

During its time as a royal residence, the Louvre saw tremendous growth. Nearly every monarch expanded it, according to History.com. Today, it covers a total area of 652,300 square feet (60,600 square meters). In 1682, Louis XIV moved the royal residence to Versailles, and the Louvre became home to various art academies, offering regular exhibitions of its members' works.

During the French Revolution, Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, were forcibly removed from Versailles and imprisoned in Tuilleries Palace, which was then adjacent to the Louvre, according to the Louvre's official website. They were beheaded there in 1793.

The National Assembly opened the Louvre as a museum in August 1793 with a collection of 537 paintings. The museum closed in 1796 because of structural problems with the

building. Napoleon reopened the museum and expanded the collection in 1801, and the museum was renamed Musée Napoléon.

"It was Napoleon Bonaparte who created the foundation for the world famous museum the Louvre is today," said Gudek Snajdar. "He wanted to be in charge of creating a collection of art in Louvre. That's why he renamed it in 1802 to the 'Napoleon Museum.' He wanted to create a museum of France with a wonderful collection of art from all around the world. He enlarged its collection by bringing art from his military campaigns, private donations and commissions he made."

Napoleon's contributions included spoils from Belgium, Italy, Prussia and Austria, according to Napoleon.org. In 1815, when Napoleon abdicated with the Treaty of Fontainebleau, almost 5,000 artworks were returned to their countries of origin. France was allowed to keep only a few hundred works, and the Louvre reverted to its original name. Many artifacts from Napoleon's conquests in Egypt remained, according to History.com.

After Napoleon, the Louvre continued to expand. The multi-building Louvre Complex was completed under the reign of Napoleon III in the mid-19th century, according to napoleon.org.