

Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel

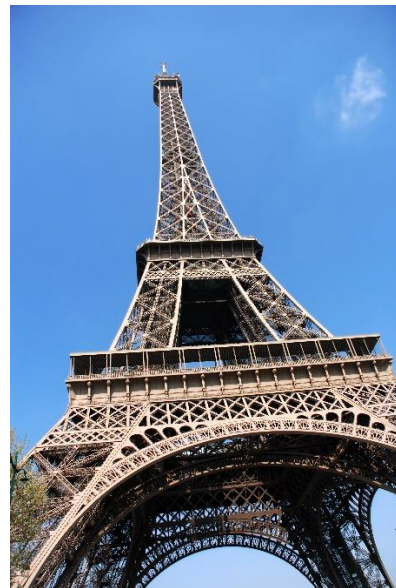


The Eiffel Tower is the tallest structure in Paris, France. Today the Eiffel Tower is known and respected worldwide. It is the most visited landmark in the world. It was named after Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel for a good reason; he designed it and supervised its building.

At the time, Eiffel was already famous for designing the "Statue of Liberty," which was a gift from France to the United States. He had also built many impressive bridges for France and other countries. His accomplishments had earned him the nickname "The Magician of Iron," just as his Tower earned the nickname "The Iron Lady."



The Statue of Liberty



The Eiffel Tower

The structure has a rich and sometimes strange history. It has attracted its share of daredevils and publicity seekers over the years. In 1912, a man made an unsuccessful attempt to parachute from the tower. A journalist rode a bicycle from the first level to the ground in 1923. A mountain climber scaled the structure in 1954. Two British men

parachuted from it—successfully this time—in 1984. In 1987, a man bungee-jumped from its top; he was unharmed, but the police arrested him as he left.

Let's have a closer look at the man behind the Tower. Eiffel was born in France in 1832. As a young man, he was strongly influenced by two uncles, who taught him to love learning. Early on, he developed a strong interest in reading and history, and later, he studied chemistry and engineering. His devotion to these subjects laid the groundwork for his later success.

Eiffel's mother also encouraged her son. She started several successful companies, ran them well, and sold them for a lot of money. She made sure her son was well-educated, and she later helped him with his career.

After college, Eiffel got a job with a company that built bridges. His first big job was as a co-manager on a bridge construction project. Over a short period, the other managers quit. Working frantically, he finished the project on his own. His bosses were very pleased with his work, and his career took off.

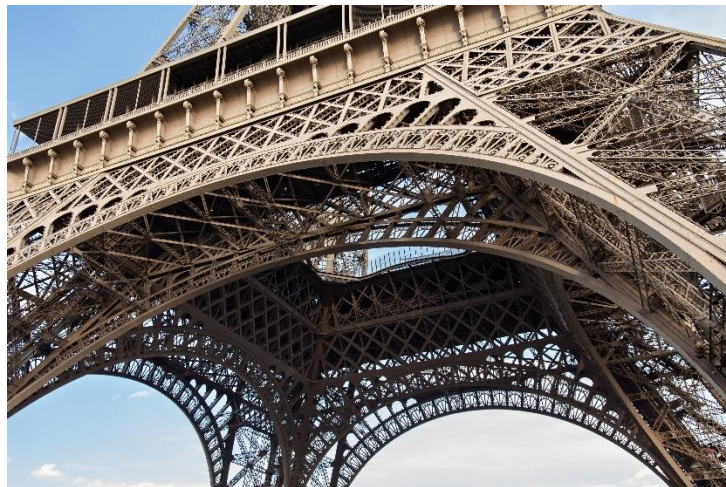
Soon, he set out on his own. He co-founded a construction business with a friend. Their first project was a Paris building called The Beehive, which people in Paris liked a lot.

Eiffel went on to design and build the bridges that helped build his reputation. These bridges were so well-built that many of them are still used today. The French government hired him to build a canal in Panama, but the project fell apart.

Eiffel married in 1862, and he and his wife had five children. Sadly, his wife died in 1887, the year after he won the contest to build the Tower. He never married again.

France wanted the tower built because it was going to host a World's Fair in 1889. The tower was to be the centerpiece of the celebration. Eiffel won the job designing the Tower in a contest that had more than 700 entries. His design was chosen unanimously by the judges. But even though Eiffel was the favorite of all the judges, many people thought his design was ugly and unsafe.

There was really no reason to worry because Eiffel knew what he was doing. He not only built a safe and sturdy structure, he created safer methods of construction. Only one worker died during the two years it took to build the Tower.



Work on the Tower began in 1887. Despite the controversy and the death of his wife, the project was finished on time. From the beginning, the Eiffel Tower was popular with tourists. During Paris World's Fair alone, nearly 2 million people went up to its top.

"I ought to be jealous of the tower," Eiffel commented at the time. "It is much more famous than I am."

That was true when he said it, but did not stay true for long. Eiffel became world-famous very quickly. He won awards and honors from many countries. He wrote more than 30 books on different subjects, which are still considered classics.

He retired from engineering in 1893, but he kept active until his death at the age of 91. Eiffel did research into ways of improving radio transmissions and also found ways to make weather forecasting more accurate. He liked to swim and fence (a type of sword-fighting) and did so almost every day until he was well into his eighties.

He went to his beloved tower almost daily until the day he died. It was there, in fact, that he did much of his research. Eiffel died peacefully in his home, listening to classical music on that popular new invention, the record player.

