

Title:

Paris Off the Beaten Path: Try Small Museums

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Summary:

Small Paris museums offer you an alternative to the large venues when you wish to avoid the crowds there. See which museums to visit here.

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Article Body:

Small Paris museums offer you an alternative to the large venues when you wish to avoid the crowds there. See which museums to visit here.

Fans of Klimt, Schiele & Co., I recently wanted to take a leisurely look at the Grand Palais blockbuster exhibition on Vienne 1900. I picked a weekday mid-afternoon, assuming I could whizz in and loiter through. Oops! I lined up before the entry (in freezing weather) for over an hour. And when I got a glimpse of the over-populated jostling going on inside, threw in the towel.

If body-contact sport isn't your ideal for expo-visiting in Paris (or elsewhere), try small museums.

Here's a sampling of Parisian fares in this vein, where - despite the displays' intrinsic interest, and English documentation generally available - you're not likely to have your feet trampled or be elbowed in the ribs. Some are so tiny they aren't mentioned in Bordas' authoritative Guide des Musées de France.

Let's begin by wandering down rue Antoine Bourdelle, 15e arrondissement (district) near the Gare Montparnasse. At no. 18 you can't not notice, through a grillwork fence, a garden hosting a bronze horse almost two storeys high.

This is the Musée Bourdelle, former home and studio of the sculptor (1861-1929) for whom the street is named, and whose work - fittingly for a small museum? - was grandiose in intent and result. The style is somewhere between rough-hewn Rodin (with whom he collaborated for a while) and Art Déco's wind-swept

streamlining.

On view are samples of his inclination for antiquity and exoticism that range from statues of Sappho and Archer Heracles to a monumental portrayal of Polish national poet Mickiewicz and bas-reliefs of music, drama, etc. for the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, inaugurated in 1913. It was inaugurated with a scandalous premiere of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, danced by a rather lightly clad Nijinsky. That year Bourdelle exhibited work at New York's landmark Armory Show.

Address:

18 rue Antoine Bourdelle

Paris 15th district

Open except Mondays and holidays 10 a.m.>6 p.m.

Full entry: €4.50; youth: €2.20; under 14: free.

Metro stations: Montparnasse, Falguière.

Just around the corner is the diminutive Musée du Montparnasse recalling such Roaring-'20s Montparnasse denizens as Hemingway, Picasso and Modigliani. It opened its doors in 1998 in a quaint paved street (Chemin du Montparnasse) which itself is worth the visit.

The museum offers its visitors a treasure trove of photographs taken by such luminaries as Robert Doisneau and Henri Cartier-Bresson, and many watercolours and prints by Montparnasse artists.

Address:

21 avenue du Maine

Paris 15th district

Open except Mondays and holidays 12:30 a.m.>7 p.m.

Full entry: €5; reduced: €4;

under 12: free;

Metro station: Montparnasse

Still closer to the Gare Montparnasse is the Musée de la Poste, an offshoot of the postal administration - and a good place to take the prettiest mail-woman in your neighborhood.

Opened in 1973, it's a museographical surprise: you take an elevator to floor five then spiral down, room-to-room, to the ground floor.

Goodies along the way include: an articulated-arm Chappe semaphore (ca. 1800), part of a France-wide network enabling messages to come 10 km. station-to-station in clear weather from, say, Calais to Paris in just over an hour until

France imported Samuel Morse's system in 1856; a lovely 1900 ceramic post office counter; and an explanation of Paris pneumatique system that, 1866>1984, air-propelled correspondence via underground tubes at a speed of up to 700 meters a minute.

Address:

34 boulevard Vaugirard

Paris 15th district

Open except Mondays and holidays 10 a.m.>6 p.m.

Full entry: €5; reduced: €3.50;

under 18 and mailmen/women: free;

Metro station: Montparnasse.

And now, for gruesomely comic (?) relief : Paris' Crime Museum a.k.a. Musée des Collections Historiques de la Préfecture de Police.

Can you imagine what early handcuffs looked - and felt - like ? Ouch ! They're there. As are: a genuine guillotine blade, perhaps used on the murderer of a nearby victim's punctured skull, and stark temporary exhibits.

A recent one of these documented oh-so-graphically the trials and tribulations of bagnards - forced-labor convicts transported to hellish camps in e.g. New Caledonia and French Guyana as late as 1953. Among them was the escapee-author of 1970s U.S. best-seller Papillon.

Address:

4 rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève

Paris 5th district

Open Monday through Friday 9 a.m.>5 p.m.

Free entry (except for executed criminals)

Metro station: Maubert-Mutualité

For wine buffs I can think of no place better than the Musée du Vin (Wine Museum). It opened its doors in 1984, and hunkers in 13th century quarries reconverted in the 16th-17th centuries by monks to store their wine (grapes grew abundantly on the Passy slopes, now facing the Eiffel Tower).

Ranging through time from Roman domination, and signposted by mini-Bacchus figures, displays include viticulturists' tools, a barrel-maker's workshop, and vessels for testing, storing, transporting and consuming the beverage.

The visit ends with... wine-tasting. You can also lunch there.

Thermal springs once flowed here, so the Wine Museum is on... rue des Eaux:

Water Street!

Address:

Rue des Eaux - 5, square Charles Dickens -

Paris 16th district

Open Tuesday through Sunday 10 a.m.>6 p.m.

Entry: €8 (includes that glass)

Metro station: Passy

(This article is a collaborative between Phil Chavanne, Senior Editor, and Arthur Gilette, a regular contributor to www.Paris-Eiffel-Tower-News.com. Both are more than happy to share their in-depth knowledge of Paris.)