A truly cultural city, Paris has much to offer visitors – tower and all.

Just how I imagined it ... Paris has something for everyone in a multifaceted, magical and mythical capital. Indeed Paris is a majestic city, a city of culture, romance, gastronomy, design and fashion.

It is also a city on the move, a city of daring. With the opening of new museums, world-class sporting events, festive and popular urban happenings, Paris is a capital that never sleeps.

Whether you are a newcomer or already familiar with the Paris scene, there is a vast choice awaiting you - over 1,800 classified monuments, 170 museums, 145 theatres and 380 cinemas. Some of the cultural sites of the capital are absolute “musts” and among the most visited monuments in the world. Several of them have UNESCO world heritage status.

Paris however is not just a historical city. Its riverbanks and neighbourhoods, some of which retain a village atmosphere, are an invitation to stroll and sightsee. By day or by night, soak up the special ambience of this magical city of love, and be carried away by its energy and vitality.

THE EIFFEL TOWER

For the first timers, the majestic view of the Eiffel Tower indeed would cast a spell that would leave you flabbergasted admiring this Modern Seven Wonders of the World.

Six-million people visit the Eiffel Tower each year to relish the 360 degree view of Paris. Nearly everyone takes an elevator up. A few hardy soles walk up the 1,665 steps to the top. It was not what I expected it to be! The pleasure was not that much for being there but it was more for being among them. How wrong I was about the French!

When the Eiffel Tower was built, it aroused fierce opposition - “hollow candlestick” or “pitiful lamp post”, were among the epithets used to describe it.
KEY STATISTICS FOR THE EIFFEL TOWER:

DATE OF BIRTH:
March 31, 1889 (hoisting the flag to the top), built for the Universal Exhibition in celebration of the French Revolution.

AGE:
115 years

CONTRACTOR:
Gustave Eiffel & Cie

ENGINEERS:
Maurice Koechlin & Emile Nougier

CONSTRUCTION:
1887 to 1889 (2 years, 2 months and 5 days)

COMPOSITION:
18,038 pieces, 2,500,000 rivets

WEIGHT OF THE METAL STRUCTURE:
7,300 tonnes

TOTAL WEIGHT:
10,100 tonnes

HEIGHT:
324m (height with flagpole)

NUMBERS OF VISITORS UP TO DECEMBER 31, 2004:
256.5 million

DISTINCTIVE FEATURE:
recognizable throughout the entire world

NUMBER OF STEPS:
1665

OWNER:
City of Paris

- 50 tonnes of paint needed to decorate it
- 20,000 light bulbs that sparkle at the 10 minutes beginning of each hour

Who would have thought when it was inaugurated in 1889, that it would become one of the best-known monuments on the planet? The tower now symbolises France across the world.

The Eiffel Tower soars 324 meters high including its broadcast antenna and flagpole. The Eiffel Tower instantly became the world’s tallest man-made structure. It broke the record held for over 4,400 years by the Khufu Pyramid in Egypt (only to lose it 41 years later to the Woolworth Building in Manhattan, New York).

It is built of structural iron, originally constructed by engineer Gustave Eiffel (after whom the tower is named) for an international exposition in Paris in 1889. The tower was the only structure in the exposition intended for permanent display, and it survives to this day intact. It narrowly escaped demolition and conversion to scrap on several occasions in its youth, but today nobody would think of tearing down the Eiffel Tower. It is the most widely recognised national landmark in the world.

The three levels of the tower offer ideal vantage points for spotting places of interest. There are elevators in the tower that can take you to the top. Double-decked elevators to the first and second levels are specially designed to ascend along the steep incline of the tower’s legs. More conventional double-decked glass elevators take you from the second level up to the summit. Since the tower is build of open ironwork, the ascent can be a very harrowing experience for anyone with a fear of heights, so beware!

The net you see surrounding the intermediate level between the second and third platforms is intended to protect painters working on that part of the tower (the public is not admitted to that small intermediate platform).

LAGGER THAN LIFE
Incidentally, the tower is much larger than it appears to be in photographs; the absence of anything of comparable height nearby makes it difficult to appreciate the tower’s height in pictures. The trees on either site of the tower are seven or eight stories high, and more than two American-style football fields would fit comfortably in the area covered by the tower’s base.

Individual people are almost too small to distinguish in most photographs, but you can see little ant-like figures near the base of the tower and on the bridge.

Indeed Paris, the eternal City of Lights, original, modern and creative is all yours. Whether you are already “in love” with the city or here for the first time, make yourself at home and you will grasp the true “spirit” of the city.

Be sure to visit the top sights of Paris - the Eiffel Tower, Champs-Elysées, Louvre, Montmartre, Latin Quarter, Notre-Dame, Palais Garnier, Musée d’Orsay, Place des Vosges, Bastille, Centre Pompidou and Parc de la Ville.

The most impressive thing is that France has managed to maintain its heritage infrastructure facilities both without compromising any. It’s really remarkable! And there is no much fuss about it!

People live generally in a comfortable life and even though there is some unemployment problem and other little issues lurking in the background, everything is handled and taken care of efficiently. People are somewhat reserved but there is an inner spring of feeling that you can discover once you let them open up! In short, this is a marvellous country with marvellous people which seems an enviable combination.

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