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Colleen's Advice

I have a question...



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Little treasures behind big doors - Walk No. 4

What's special

I was looking for unusual churches in Paris. My research turned up several in a small area of the 6th and 7th arrondissements. You will visit chapels with magnificent interiors and in some, wax effigies of their saints in glass coffins, and small museums (art, interiors and martyrs).

If you have any curiosity about architecture, you will find a mixture of styles in this area. With a limited knowledge of architecture, reading the signs on the buildings and the historical markers gives one an idea of the age of the building.

Time

About 2 hours, not including stops at restaurants, chocolate shops, shoe stores, tearooms, etc.

I have given you three parks along the walk in case you prefer a picnic instead of a prepared meal.

Vocabulary and architecture hints

In Europe, the ground floor is not the first floor. In other words, the American first floor is Europe's ground floor (0 or RC-rez de chaussée). Many houses in this area have signs dating events and/or the people who were either born, lived or died in them.

Né – born, Mort – died, Vécu – lived, Dégrifé/Stock – name brands marked down in price (this will come in handy on the outlet mall street: rue Saint-Placide).

Go to the websites and check opening times before starting your walk:

Chapelle des Lazaristes Saint Vincent de Paul

95, rue de Sèvres 6th arr.

01 45 49 84 84

Open every day from 7 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Métro: Vaneau.

The chapel was built in 1830 to house the relics of Saint Vincent de Paul, founder of the Lazrists (or mission priests) and the sisters of Charity.

(or sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul)

Feast day: September 27

Communion on Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

Every day except Tuesday 7:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Sunday 7:20 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesday open all day 7:45 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Public holidays: 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Additional information including masses, visit their [information page](#).

Chapelle des Missions Etrangères (Chapel of Foreign Missionaries)

128, rue du Bac 7th arr.

01 44 39 10 40

Métro: Sèvres-Babylone.

[Masses](#)

Founded in 1663, this seminary prepares its students for missions in the Orient.

The chapel contains the sepulchres of numerous priests, who died as martyrs in the Far East.

Among the interred are Jean-Gabriel Dufresne and Jean-Théophile Vénard, martyred in Viet-Nam, as well as 21 others.

Communion on Sunday at 10 a.m.

Start of the walk

Exit the metro Vaneau on line 10.

Our first stop across the street (50 yds. to the left) is the Chapel of St. Vincent de Paul between 93 and 95, rue de Sèvres. Open daily 0700-1200 and 1330 until 1830. Masses are at 0715 and on Sunday 1030.

Enter this chapel with its beautiful sky blue and gold ceiling with sepia-toned and yellow stained glass. If you would like to view the wax effigy of Vincent de Paul in the glass-encased coffin behind the altar, walk up the right aisle and take the stairs behind the altar.

You can learn more about St. Vincent and this chapel next to the postcards (a laminated brochure is available for you to read). Exit the chapel.

Note for your curiosity: If you are curious about the buildings behind the high wall across the street from the chapel, this was the Laennec hospital. The facility has moved south to a new hospital, Georges Pompidou. Some of the structures will remain such as the chapel. The rest will make way for apartments for senior citizens (troisième age) and other speculative endeavors.



Hospice des Incurables across from the St. Vincent Chapel

From the generous donations of Cardinal François de La Rochefoucauld, Grand Aumônier of France, the Hospice for the Incurable was founded. The buildings are in the shape of a cross, with the chapel in the center. They were built between 1634 and 1638 by the architect Gamard. The hospice admitted local residents stricken with incurable infections who were refused admission at l'Hôtel-Dieu. For the first time all patients had their own bed. From 1689, the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul cared for the invalids. Closed in 1869, the hospice was transformed into a hospital. Although he never practiced here, the hospital was named after Lænnec, the inventor of the stethoscope, five years later. (His stethoscope is on display at the Musée de l'Histoire de la Médecine. Turn left on rue de Sèvres.

Along the way you will pass our first lunch proposal, le Petite Lutetia (107 rue de Sèvres, 01.45.48.33.53, M°Vaneau, Bus 39, 70, 87(northbound). Very Epoque-period atmosphere, pleasant surroundings, okay food. Menu: 27€ includes starter, main course, dessert and coffee; à la carte available.)

Continue to the first corner, rue St. Romain.

In front of you is the Hôtel de Choiseul-Praslin on the corner. It was to become a bread museum but is now for sale. The historical marker is in front of the building.



Hôtel de Choiseul-Praslin Across from 58 rue de Sèvres, a really cute, tiny 3-storey building

The hôtel was built in 1732 by the architect Gaubier for the Countess de Choiseul. In 1746 she left the house to her nephew the Count of Choiseul, César Gabriel, an ambassador, then minister, who had a brilliant career. The Count gave his name to the residence that he enlarged, decorated and occupied between 1745 and 1765. In 1762, he became the Duke of Praslin. In 1768, the house was sold to the father of the Count of Saint-Simon, founder of Saint-Simonism. Rented in 1807 to the scientist Adamson it passed through several hands until in 1876 when its owner worked until his death trying to fix it up. The French government finally confiscated the house in 1886 and it was turned into National Savings Bank. Despite the house's misfortunes the residence is an excellent example of 18th century architecture.

Go back to rue St. Romain and turn right. Go to the end of the street, rue du Cherche-Midi.

Le Bistrot Landais, my alternate lunch suggestion, is on the corner of rue St. Romain and rue du Cherche-Midi (104 rue du Cherche-Midi, 01.42.22.66.23, M°Vaneau, bus 39, 70, 87(northbound). Very frenchy bistrot – hard to find a tourist, fills up between 1230 and 1330! 11,50€ includes starter, main course and coffee or main course, dessert and coffee. 16€ includes a special selection of main courses, dessert and coffee; large choice of good salads and à la carte menu).

Chocolate shop

For a chocolate and sweet fix - next door is Puyricard Chocolatier Confiseur en Provence.

Facing the walled residence at 95 rue Cherche-Midi with the wrought iron door decorations, turn left and walk along rue Cherche-Midi.



Hôtel de Montmorency 85 rue du Cherche Midi

The little house of Montmorency at no. 85 was constructed in 1743 and acquired by the Count of Montmorency-Bours in 1752. The larger house at no. 89 was built in 1756 for the Count and is equally a wonderful example of classic architecture.

Made over into a museum for the painter E. Hébert (1817-1908) the smaller house was donated to the French government in 1974. The different aspects of talent of Hébert are presented here. Hébert was not only the official painter for the Second Empire, but was also director of the Villa Médicis in Rome.

The larger residence, nowadays the Embassy of Mali, was purchased in 1808 by Marshal Lefebvre. His wife, "Madame No Worries" sold the house, never having lived here. The entry with a beautifully ornate stairway is decorated with a plaster model of the Emperor sculpted by Roland by the Institute and a medallion of Louis XV.

Note

The guide told me that the adopted son of Mme. Hébert, never met E. Hébert. The son lived on the upper two floors and would come down occasionally when visitors were in the museum and invite them upstairs and share anecdotes with them. He died in 1974 and the museum and residence was entrusted to the Hébert foundation and the state.

Across from the Musée Hébert is a charming three-star hotel, [Ferrandi Hotel](#) (details under [Hotels](#)).

Turn right on rue Jean Ferrandi and we are heading for the chapel, Notre-Dame des Anges (Our Lady of the Angels) -- closed during July and August.

When you reach rue de Vaugirard, turn right (a grocery store - G20 is across the street) and walk to 102bis.

Hidden behind a regular façade is a miniature Notre-Dame complete with rose windows.

Go through the large brown doors and up a few steps into the chapel.

In addition to admiring the stained glass windows, take a careful look at the Virgin on the altar surrounded by angels holding musical instruments.

When I first saw this statue, it was covered in soot. It was not until I attended a mass in the crypt next door that I learned during a sermon on angels that they were holding musical instruments. Hopefully, the light is turned on so you can admire this unusual presentation, too.

History and info about the chapel Notre-Dame des Anges

The written visit is provided in French, my abridged English translation follows:

Notre-Dame des Anges is a remarkable example of 12th c. neo-gothic architecture, an extremely popular style during the Second Empire (1852-1870), designed by the religious architect Father Gally.

The architecture

The street façade is not particularly interesting architecturally. The vault rises 17 metres/50 feet, the cylindrical columns are crowned in leaves. One can appreciate the quality of the architecture and the care for detail, especially on the columns.

On the capitals of the altar notice the detail of the strange figures among the leaves making faces. Look very closely; they are not easy to see at first.

The windows

The interior is particularly remarkable with its series of story-telling windows. The 37 stained glass windows, two of them rose windows on each side of the transept are the work of a known master, Joseph Vigné of Bordeaux.

They form a rare, homogeneous grouping dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Meyer of the Institute of Christian Arts, Munich, sculpted the statuary representing the Virgin surrounded by angelic musicians in 1866. To the right of the transept is a Christ figure in wood from the 16th c.

History

The chapel was constructed between 1864 and 1866 for the community of Marists (priests devoted to the Virgin Mary).

In 1843, the new congregation of Marists established their Mission for the South Seas. The 12 priests lived at 5 rue de Montparnasse and worked with their mission and other ministerial duties.

In 1863 the city of Paris decided to construct the parish church, Notre-Dame-des-Champs right where they lived. They bought the Hôtel de Martignac and its gardens and constructed the building at 104 and the chapel, Notre-Dame-des-Anges.

During the next 40 years the chapel experienced various difficult periods (the state had been victimizing the religions since the revolution and it this history continued until 1908).

In 1871 during the Prussian siege of Paris, two canon balls destroyed the windows of the nave, and landed in the crypt. In 1880 the priests were driven away by the police exercising the judicial orders against the religious. The chapel remained closed; and following the law of 1901, the chapel was put under lock and key in 1903.

The facility was used as a conference hall from 1906 before being returned to the religious in 1908....

Note

Exit, turn right and enter 104 rue de Vaugirard. (Take a moment to cross the street and see how hidden the chapel is behind the façade.)

Walk down the hallway, enter the next door (ouvre-porte - push the button) and pass through an atrium style sitting room. To the right is the crypt; straight through and up a couple of steps through the hall takes you to the garden.

A modern French Mass is held in the modern designed crypt (no sarcophagus or cobwebs) on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 1210.



Le 104 rue de Vaugirard
next door to the chapel (closed July and August)

The priests' residence housed the activities of the Montalembert Circle that was created in 1895 in order to give Parisian students a religious and apostolic education. In 1898, Father Plazenet founded a residence for those arriving in Paris from regions outside the city. This annex proved so successful that it had to be moved to no.104. The members of the Student Union were talented in many disciplines: Catholic teachers, social groups led by Robert Garric aided their militant ideas.

Little by little these privileged young people became so content with their working condition that it was to the detriment of their spiritual, philosophical and social education.

Facing this reversal of priorities and economic difficulties, the Foyer closed in 1981. But the spirit of no. 104 through its friendliness and influence, profoundly marked past residents such as François Mauriac (Nobel Prize 1952, writer), François Mitterrand (president), Edouard Balladur (prime minister).

Today the building houses a cultural center run by the Maristes priests.

Picnic spot

They have a pleasant garden in the back that you are welcome to enjoy.

One day when I was in the garden, people were walking by and disappearing. I felt like Alice in Wonderland and everyone was disappearing underground.

Actually, I found out that the "disparus" live in the building behind the garden wall and they were taking a shortcut through the shed in the back of the garden. Mystery solved.

Leave the cultural center and turn left and continue rue de Vaugirard, passing rue Jean Ferrandi.

At the 1st street on your left is rue l'abbé Grégoire, a very quiet street with hotels, small businesses and apartment buildings. At the corner of Abbé Grégoire and Cherche-Midi is the house where Dr. Lænnec lived between 1825 and 1826.

Turn left on rue Saint-Placide. This places you on the outlet mall street for clothes and shoes. Some of the stores are at regular prices. Let shopping experience and instinct be your guide.

Chocolate shop - Côte de France, 52, rue Saint-Placide

Note for your curiosity

If it is a weekday, push the button above the number pad/digicode and enter to see the interior courtyards or entrance halls of most buildings.

When you reach the corner of Saint-Placide and Cherche-Midi you will notice a rooster on the roof of the house with the sundial - Maison de Tambour (1651). Although the sundial appears to fit in with the age of the house, it was placed there in 1982.

Note

This is a summary of the information that is behind the wood frame windows of the building:

On the 5th of May 1651, the building at 28, rue Saint Placide and 56 rue du Cherche-Midi belonged to the Abbey of Saint German des Prés. At the sound of the bell, the abbey assembled their group as usual, this time to sell the house to Nicolas Bondin (notary of the famous d'Artagnan and the king of the Chatelet of Paris.

The articles in the window were found during the excavation of the interior wells that still exist. One well was for drain water and the other was to store fresh water.

In 1654, the windows of this house opened onto the countryside and the Mont de Parnesse. This portion of rue Saint Placide was a garden pathway until the Hausmannien period of development after 1850.

Be sure to take a peek through the windows of the pharmacy - the wood!

Continue on Saint-Placide and walk past some more shoe stores and clothing stores.

At 22, rue Saint-Placide is a three star hotel [Hôtel Sèvres Saint Germain](#) that has a "charming and warm atmosphere of an 18th century house with wood beam ceilings...." (Details under [Hotels](#).)

You are now heading toward rue de Sèvres and the department store, le Bon Marché, the chapel of the Miraculous Medal, and then through a garden to a mission and its museum.

Cross rue de Sèvres and notice that [rue Saint Placide](#) becomes [rue du Bac](#) in the 7th arrondissement.

Break spot/tea rooms

The gourmet grocery store of Bon Marché is on the left. Upstairs is a nice little tearoom, open between 150 and 1800. The antique dealers (Galerie des Antiquaires - 0930-1900 except Sunday) are on the same floor.

Tearooms and brasseries are nice if you have missed lunch or just want a sandwich, salad or a break.

At 140, rue du Bac (just past Bon Marché's grocery) is the **Chapelle Notre-Dame de la Médaille Miraculeuse (Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal)**. If the doors are closed, you will recognize the church by the line of people waiting outside to enter. This has to be the busiest church in Paris.

The chapel is open 0745 to 1300 (on Sundays at 0720), 1430 to 1900; Tuesdays all day between 0745 to 1900. Flyers available at the reception with times of Masses and other services.

On each side of the altar are the caskets of Saint Louise de Marillac to the left and that of Saint Catherine Labouré. The latter received a visit of the Virgin Mary in 1830. I'm not sure if these are actual bodies or wax effigies.



Notre-Dame de la Médaille Miraculeuse
140 rue du Bac

An imperial decree of March 25, 1813 gave this house of Chatillon to the Sisters of Charity. Louise de Marillac, inspired by Saint Vincent de Paul, founded the Sisters of Charity during the 17th century.

In 1830 the Virgin Mary appeared to Catherine Labouré and thus began a widespread devotion that continues to the present at the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Over the course of a century, the chapel was enlarged several times after these first appearances. A. Richardière renovated the chapel to its present form in 1930. The coffin with the relics of Catherine Labouré was placed in the chapel at the foot of Mary's statue sculpted by Maxime Real del Sarte.

Turn left on rue du Bac and walk past the religious gift shop, Stella Maris.

This little area abounds in small restaurants, brasseries and cafés along rue du Bac and around the the next corner (see restaurant ideas in the 7th arrondissement).

At the corner of rue du Bac and rue de Babylone, cross the street to **Les Missions Étrangères de Paris (The Society of Foreign Missions)**. The museum of martyrs is open Monday-Friday 0900-1215/1330-1900.

Enter through the *librairie*/bookstore on the corner or through the large green doors at 122 rue du Bac. Cross the small courtyard and enter below the chapel stairs. (By the way, l'Hôtel des Missions Étrangères is next door to where Chateaubriand died on July 4th 1848.)

"The paintings are the work of Vietnamese painters who were contemporaries of the martyrs and witnessed their ordeals." They were the "reporters and photographers of their time".

Inside the drawers are mementos such as photos, letters, clothing, ponytails, etc. Originally, all of these items were housed in a small room across the courtyard which was considered in the eyes of the seminary as the smallest one-room museum in the world. It was so small, that a guide box spoke to you in your chosen language and a note over the light switch reminded you to turn out the light when you left. In existence for over 150 years, this museum portrays the violent deaths of Christian missionaries in Vietnam, China, Korea and Japan.

The first mission building was constructed in 1663, and was renovated and enlarged in 1675, 1732 and 1869.

One more curiosity

Now there is only one more curiously hidden church to show you.

Return to rue de Sèvres (past the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal) and turn left

Walk past the Bon Marché and along the park to the Eglise St. Ignace, 33 rue de Sèvres.

Across from Parc Boucicaut is a terribly obvious black/brown "modern" apartment building among the traditional.

Go through the arcade and at the back, is a fascinating Jesuit church from 1855 that blends 1970s styling with neo-Gothic.

The arcades on the side aisles have arches that separate three-wall chapels, each with their own ornate, wooden confessional.

Each chapel commemorates a saint with their life story posted on the side of the confessional. The beautiful display of paintings, stories, decorations and altars and gives the feeling of each being a church on its own.

One of the separate chapels was converted into a modern version of a confessional with its paneling and aluminum framing – interesting contrast.

Since the start of renovation in May 2000, the seating and altar arrangement is now in the form of a theatre in the round.

You are now on your own to shop until you drop or go back and pray for euros from heaven.

