

FEATURE

STATE OF THE ART

A long-established hub of art and culture, Europe promises masterpieces from every era. Here are the recommended galleries and museums to visit on the continent.
By Elinor Davies



The Ognissanti Madonna
by Giotto di Bondone, in the
Uffizi Gallery, Florence
Right: The Louvre, Paris



Uffizi Gallery, Florence

This gallery holds one of the world's most significant collections of Renaissance artwork, featuring artists such as Sandro Botticelli, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Many of the works on display previously belonged to the Medici family, Florence's former ruling dynasty.

The beautiful building was commissioned by Cosimo I de Medici in 1560, for use as judicial offices. It opened to the public in 1769 after the Grand Duke's son decided to repurpose the offices to display the family's extensive art collection.

In 2021, 14 rooms were added, increasing capacity for works created by women and people of color. The art continues on the museum's balconies, with stunning views over the rose-hued Tuscan city.

DON'T MISS: The Birth of Venus by Botticelli, thought to date back to the 1480s.

The Louvre, Paris

Perhaps the world's best-known museum, the Louvre was built in the 12th century. Its foundations can still be seen in the basement, as part of the Medieval Louvre exhibition.

In the 16th century, the building was revived and became the primary residence of the French monarchy. It remained a royal palace until Louis XIV's move to Versailles in 1682.

Today, the Louvre is the world's most visited museum. It houses art, sculpture and archaeological finds from antiquity to the 21st century. To see the entire 480,000-object inventory would take days, so choose your favorite collections and begin there.

DON'T MISS: Venus de Milo, the ancient Greek marble statue, is among the most famous pieces in the Louvre. Experts believe it was created between 160-110 BCE and that it depicts Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

Acropolis Museum, Athens

The Athenian Parthenon is one of the most famous symbols of Ancient Greece, so where better to explore the wonders of the civilization's archaeology than a museum located a mere ten-minute stroll away?

The Acropolis Museum focuses on local archaeological sites, with excavations from the Greek Bronze Age to the days of Roman and Byzantine Greece. Founded in 2003, the building's sleek, modern architecture creates a contrast with the collection of antiquities within. With pockets of glass flooring, the corridors themselves become exhibits as visitors peer at sprawling archaeological ruins that have been carefully excavated below.

DON'T MISS: The Sandalbinder — an impressive relief carving of the goddess Nike, which was originally situated in the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis of Athens. ▶

Museum of the Second World War, Gdańsk

The Museum of the Second World War, in northern Poland, houses the most extensive collection of artifacts from the conflict. It is divided chronologically into three sections: 'the road to war', 'the horror of war' and 'the long shadow of war'. Each focuses on the Polish experience, against a backdrop of the wider world context and instills in visitors the long-term impact of the deadliest battles in history.

Some of the more personal exhibits — detailing the lives and experiences of civilians — are not for the fainthearted. But this museum stands as a monument to events that should never be forgotten.

DON'T MISS: Personal effects — including letters, diaries and photographs — from those who experienced the war. The museum also hosts screenings of US and European movies.

British Museum, London

Founded in 1753, the British Museum is the world's oldest national public museum and continues to offer free entry.

With a vast collection of eight million artifacts from around the globe, the London landmark documents human culture from the earliest civilizations to the modern era. Among the 80,000 artifacts on display at any one time, the Ancient Egyptian collection is arguably the most impressive: mummies lie beside statues and totems stand almost as tall as the grand, neoclassical ceilings.

Equally impressive is the two-acre Great Court at the heart of the building. Connecting each section of the museum under an impressive, curved glass and steel roof, it's the largest covered square in Europe.

DON'T MISS: The Rosetta Stone, the historical tool used to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Below: Museum of the Second World War, Gdańsk, Poland.
Opposite: St Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Rome; spiral staircase, Vatican Museums

