

World Geography

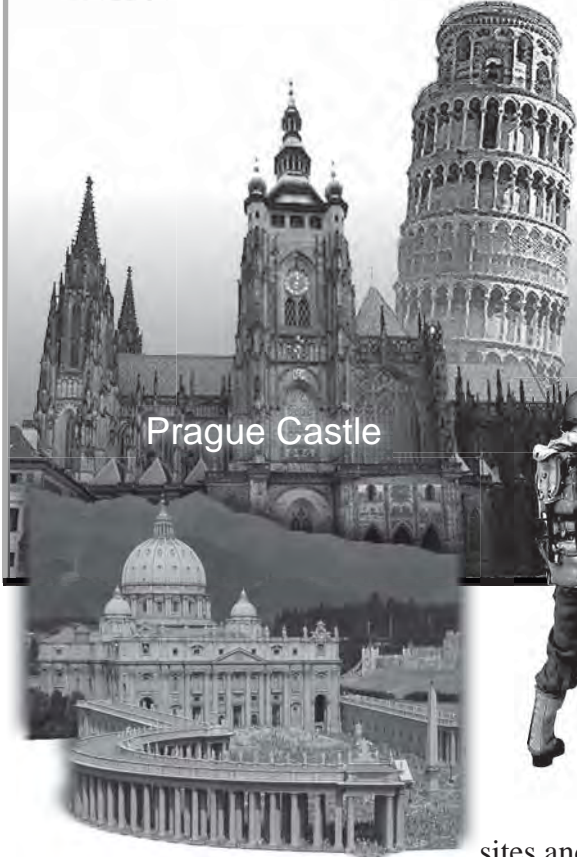
Chapter 3

Famous Events and Sites of Europe



Lesson 6 Famous Events and Sites

Section 2 Lesson 6-10



Prague Castle

Perhaps no continent on Earth has such a storied and fascinating history as Europe. Save, perhaps, the Middle East, which most historians believe to be the cradle of civilization, Europe's global sway and influence is unparalleled, both historically and today. Politically and economically, all of Western civilization owes to Europe for its foundational ideas and Judeo-Christian values. Culturally,

Europe has long been an innovator in arenas as diverse as technology, religion, medicine, fashion, and science.

Militarily, some of history's most powerful armies and horrific battles have sprung from Europe's shores. It has been the site of two world wars, spawned countless books and films on its events, and birthed a higher density of tourist attractions than perhaps any region, including the United States.

As is true of many regions, the important sites and monuments in Europe are inextricably tied to its history, and a proper appreciation for these places' significance depends on an understanding of the events that birthed them.

The fact that the seven most visited tourist attractions in Europe are in either London or Paris is a testament to Western Europe's far greater number of landmarks and monuments than Eastern Europe. Admittedly, this is partly a function of the regions' comparative economic situations. Western Europeans, far more wealthy, in general, than their eastern counterparts, have money to spend on both constructing landmarks and visiting them. However, the continent's western side is also more culturally and

VOCABULARY

classical antiquity: pertaining to ancient culture, especially Greek and Roman

abdicate: to give up; to relinquish

edifice: building; structure

economically developed than its east, and thus, important sites in Eastern Europe are sparser and less widely known. As the entire continent, however, is steeped in cultural, religious, and political history, landmarks can be found throughout, with significant stories attached to each of them.

Europe was the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation that brought the world out of the oppressive Dark Ages. Religious reformers such as Martin Luther, John Knox, John Calvin, and William Tyndale gave the common people access to the Bible in their own languages. That freedom opened doors to new political insights, science, art, and literature that propelled Europe to worldwide prominence. Availability of the Bible in the English language is considered the pivotal event in European history because of its influence on world politics, religious freedom, and literature.

In the west, London accounts for three of Europe's top ten tourist attractions, including the world's fourth-most visited destination, Trafalgar Square. This plaza, in the heart of London, which attracts over 15 million visitors annually, centrally features Nelson's Column, a tribute to Admiral Horatio Nelson, and

Famous Sites of Europe Map



provides access to the National Gallery and The Mall, upon which Washington, D.C.'s National Mall was based. The square prominently features fountains, a set of four lions guarding Nelson's Column, and other aesthetic enhancements, in preparation for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

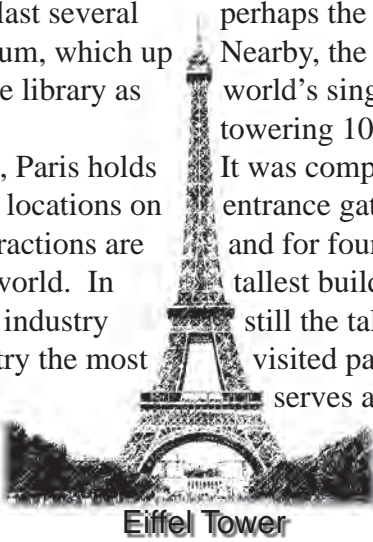
The British Museum is Britain's second-most popular destination, similar to the United States' Smithsonian Institution. Established in 1753, the museum holds some 7 million items in its collection, which is among the largest in the world. Items on display include ancient busts of Egyptian pharaohs dating to 1200 BC and earlier, the mummy of Cleopatra, and the Rosetta Stone. In addition, art, ranging from *classical antiquity* to ancient



Buddhist limestone reliefs to Asian illustrations dating within the last several centuries, are part of the museum, which up until recently housed a massive library as well.

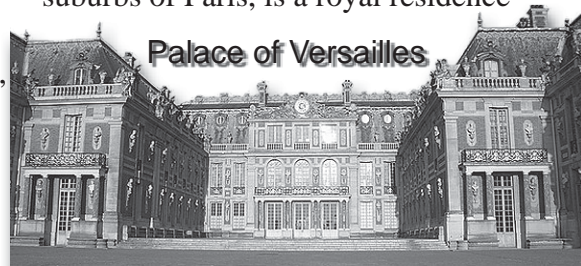
Two hundred miles south, Paris holds five of the seven most popular locations on the continent. Its premiere attractions are among the best known in the world. In recent years, France's tourism industry has boomed, making the country the most visited in the world, a trend that has largely been fueled by Paris's abundance of important sites. Ironically, France was the location for the horrible Reign of Terror during which occurred the bloody French Revolution that birthed the Napoleonic era. The French dictator's reign devastated thousands of communities across Europe. Interestingly, the French Revolution inspired numerous famous literary pieces: *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Les Miserables*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Notre Dame de Paris, a Gothic cathedral and the site of the Catholic Archdiocese of Paris, tops the list in the Île de la Cité, an island in the Seine and Paris's historic city center. Built over a two hundred year-span in the Middle Ages, the church houses one of the world's largest organs and is a spectacular example of Gothic architecture, among the first to use flying buttresses, which have long been considered a trademark of the Gothic style.

While the British Museum may be the most famous in Great Britain, the Louvre takes the prize for the most famous museum in the world. Located in the 12th-century Louvre Palace, and boasting its iconic pyramid building, the museum is home to thousands of both French and foreign



cultural artifacts, including the Mona Lisa, perhaps the world's most famous painting. Nearby, the Eiffel Tower is possibly the world's single most recognizable structure, towering 1063 feet above the capital city. It was completed in 1889 to serve as the entrance gate for the 1889 World's Fair, and for four decades was the world's tallest building. Today, the building is still the tallest in France and is the most visited paid monument in the world. It serves as an icon for the entire French nation. In a way, it is perhaps comparable with the United States' Statue of Liberty, which was a gift from France to the U.S.

France holds several other significant sites outside its renowned capital. The Palace of Versailles, located in the suburbs of Paris, is a royal residence



established by King Louis XIV in 1682 and one of the most dramatic palaces in the world. It effectively moved the center of French political power out of Paris for two hundred years, only to **abdicate** it during the French Revolution. During its tenure, the site served as a seat for the entire national government. Still a national monument, the palace boasts 700 rooms, thousands of pieces of priceless artwork, and a staggering 550,000 square feet of floor space.

In northwestern France, Normandy constitutes a region



on the English Channel and is famous for World War II's D-Day Invasion that took place on its beaches. Among the war's bloodiest skirmishes—the Battle of Normandy saw around 10,000 Allied soldiers killed, wounded, captured, or missing—it marked the war's turning point, tipping the scales in favor of the Allied forces. The momentum shift eventually led to the surrender of Germany.

Like France, Italy also maintains an impressive list of famous sites. Rome is the location of many of these, foremost



Colosseum

of which is the Colosseum, a two-thousand-year-old amphitheater in the central city that is partially in ruins. The

largest example of Roman architecture still in existence, the building was completed in the 1st century AD, could seat 50,000 spectators, and is famous for hosting gladiator contests. The films *Ben-Hur*, *Gladiator*, and *The Robe* depicted this culture at the time of Jesus poignantly. Across town, the Pantheon is nearly as old, built as a temple to all Roman gods (hence the name “Pantheon”) and including the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome. Elsewhere, in the city of Pisa, the Leaning Tower of Pisa is a curiosity for its small lean. Built as a bell tower for the adjacent cathedral, the 800-year-old tower began to lean shortly after construction and now angles about 4° from vertical.



Leaning Tower of Pisa

Other famous sites in Europe center

on both historical and cultural realities. In Prague, Czech Republic, the Prague Castle is argued by some to be the oldest and largest castle in the world. Construction dates back to the 9th century and the castle contains numerous churches, halls, gardens, and other features in its territory, which comprises an entire neighborhood. Heroes' Square in Budapest,

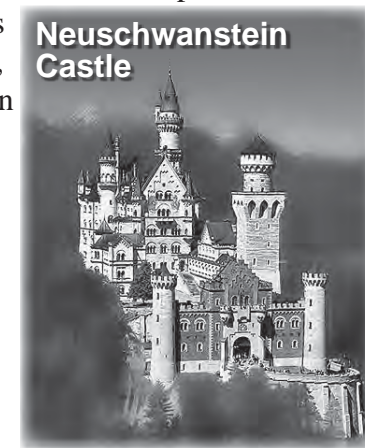
Hungary is among the most important squares in the country and home to the Millennium Monument,



St. Peter's Basilica

standing 118 feet high and crowned with a statue of the angel Gabriel. In central Rome, the Vatican City's 0.17 square miles are impressively dense with important sites, such as St. Peter's Basilica, one of the world's best known churches, and the Sistine Chapel. The enclave within Rome is the world's smallest country and serves as headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. Other important sites in Europe include the Bridge of Sighs in Venice, Italy,

Neuschwanstein Castle in southern Germany (the inspiration for Disneyland's Sleeping Beauty Castle), St. Michael's Golden-



Neuschwanstein Castle

Domed Cathedral in Kiev, Ukraine, and the Athens Acropolis (a collection of buildings and monuments from ancient Greece).

Amsterdam, Netherlands is home to one

of the world's finest orchestras and is also known for its culturally diverse nightlife and, unfortunately, rampant drug use, pornography, and prostitution.

If Eastern Europe has an equivalent of Paris in terms of important landmarks, it is Moscow. The capital of Russia, with 15 million residents in its metropolitan area, is home to some of the continent's, and indeed the world's, most recognizable buildings. The Kremlin, headquarters of Russia's executive branch, is a historic complex in the city center, built in the Middle Ages and comprising a combination of palaces, cathedrals, towers, and other *edifices*. Ironically, religious freedom in Russia was shut down during the cruel reign of Joseph Stalin, who slaughtered more than 30 million Russians who opposed the communist collective farming policy. Nevertheless, Moscow is home to some of the most elaborate churches in Europe. The Kremlin is neighbored by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the tallest Eastern Orthodox church in the world and notable for its large golden-domed roofs. Red Square in the downtown area, like London's Trafalgar Square, is a plaza from which originate some of Moscow's

main transportation arteries and which is bordered by red buildings of significant importance to the nation.

Perhaps Russia's most familiar building is not a political one, however, but a religious one. Saint Basil's Cathedral, the flamboyant candy-colored church in central Moscow, was constructed in the 16th century at the command of Ivan the Terrible, and sports a mainly pink body with brightly colored domed rooftops. It is part of the Russian Orthodox Church and was named after Saint Basil of Russia, upon whose grave the adjoining chapel is built. Not quite as notable as the cathedral is the Ostankino Tower. It is Europe's tallest free-standing structure at 1,772 feet above the city and is used for radio and television broadcasting.



**Bridge of Sighs
Venice,
Italy**

LIFE PRINCIPLE



The man who makes no mistakes does not usually make anything.

- Edward Phelps