



Guild of Location Managers

INFORMATION

## Paris - A Fam Trip

Picture the scene. You are attending a camera recce at St. Pancras Station, which isn't going well. The Director constantly changes his or her mind, the parking arrangements have all gone to pot, the crew have decided that today is the day for playing 'wind up the Location Manager' and the Producer is looking at you in a way that makes you feel that tomorrow might be the day to start looking for a new job. You discover your passport in your coat pocket; without a backward glance your credit card is out and two hours later you are on the phone to your significant life partner, explaining that you won't be home for dinner as you are eating in a little restaurant on the Rive Gauche.

Despite having the most beautiful station in London to start from, and it being so quick and easy to travel on Eurostar, I don't think we make enough use of the train to Paris. The Ile de France Film Commission clearly think so too so they contacted the Guild to arrange a Fam. trip, which they called "From Paris with Love" This was to be a Fam. Trip with a difference, they would arrange to show us two of the most iconic and difficult to arrange locations in Paris to prove that even Versailles and Le Musée du Louvre are possible filming locations. This would be a chance to see both these world heritage sites without the crowds and to explore some of the areas that are not open to the general public. As a bonus, we were also to be given a private viewing of the extraordinary Monet exhibition, where 148 of the world's most famous impressionist painter's works have been collected together for a once in a lifetime exhibition. Despite a gratifyingly busy time for the industry we were able to muster an excellent cross section of Location Managers from all aspects of our industry, ranging from stills specialists to the major blockbuster feature film location managers. We met at 6.30am on Monday morning in the Eurostar departure hall and after a short hiatus while we sorted out the train tickets we boarded the train for Paris Gare du Nord.

A little over two hours later we arrived in the hustle and bustle of Paris and after being met by our hosts, Olivier, Stephané, Eric and Constance, we walked across the road to our Hotel to drop our bags. By now, the freezing rain, which had been battering London, arrived in Paris so we boarded the mini-bus to be driven to Versailles following the route of Paris' St. Martin canal, past the bridge and canal lock where the *Hotel du Nord* film was set. It was a shame that we weren't to have an opportunity to stop and take photos as is normal on a Fam Trip but to be fair, the weather was atrocious and Stephané kept up a running commentary of the areas that we were passing as well as sparring with Johnny Ludlow, all in his second language. It was impressive. The temperature monitor on the coach showed 5°C as we disembarked and with the rain sleeting down, we entered the Palace.

It's the scale of the place that hits you. The surface area of the palace is said to be 67,000m<sup>2</sup> with 700 rooms and over 2,000 windows. From the first beautifully restored hall and stone staircase to the sumptuous royal apartments and the extraordinary Hall of Mirrors, which spans the full width of the palace, we were treated to a real symbol of the French Monarchy and absolute power in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

As well as the more familiar rooms and areas, normally open to the public we were shown the less well-known spaces, including *Le Opéra Royal de Versailles*; the Versailles Palace Theatre and Opera House. Built between 1763 and 1770 to celebrate the marriage of the future Louis XVI to Archduchess Marie-Antoinette of Austria, the theatre was built entirely of wood, painted to look like marble. It has 770 seats and was at the time the largest theatre in Europe. The original design came complete with an elevator under the orchestra pit to allow it to rise up to stage level so that the theatre could also accommodate balls and banqueting. This was apparently a cost-saving exercise, which seemed at odds with the sumptuousness of the rest of the building.

We were warned that the wood has now become very dry and represents a considerable fire risk, making filming in the theatre and auditorium very difficult. However, it occurs to me that the film lights are almost exactly the same as those used for the theatre productions so surely the risk is the same. I am sure with sufficient advance notice and careful organisation it would be possible to film in this stunning example of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Theatre, providing you had deep pockets and a relevant storyline.



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## INFORMATION

We were shown the Royal Box with a grill that could be swung into place should the royal occupants not want to be bothered by the 'hoi polloi' in the cheaper seats a not un-common experience apparently.

Suddenly the afternoon sun sank below the clouds and we were treated to the most beautiful golden light on the west face of the palace so we were able to capture some stunning photographs of the fountains and water park with the palace in the background.

Regaining our coach, we threaded our way back through the early evening traffic towards our hotel for a quick change of clothes before heading out again to the famous Duc De Lombard Jazz Club for a taste of traditional Parisian nightlife. (Johnny was hoping for Can-Can dancers with feathers but you can't have everything!).

Day Two dawned with more grey skies and rain. However we were heading to the Musée du Louvre for a chance to see this enormous museum and art gallery almost completely on our own. Again it is the sheer size of the building that hits you. From the vast *Cour Carrée* terrace with the slightly incongruous glass pyramid in its centre, which is part of the entrance, to the interior spaces, we were taken from one beautiful room to another. Again, we had the chance to see areas not normally open to the public and representing other possible filming areas. Starting in the original medieval portion at the base of the building, we worked our way slowly round and through a myriad of rooms, displays and corridors. Clearly we would need more than a morning to visit all of its treasures.

From the modern and impressive entrance hall, beneath the pyramid, we headed to one of the building's many, many staircases and up into, what was, part of the original palace and the apartments belonging to Napoleon III. Here we saw rooms laid out with their original 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century furniture and wall hangings, including some truly breathtaking salons, finished in a mixture of red and gold walls and stunning ceiling painting. Until the 1980's these rooms were part of the finance ministry. It was the then President Mitterrand who arranged for the ministry to be moved out allowing displays of works of art throughout the building. We speculated as to the reaction of the Minister of Finance on being told that he was leaving his Napoleon III dining room.

Ascending another stunning staircase of white marble and looking like something out of an Escher drawing, we entered the more traditional museum-like galleries and wondered through collections of ceramics and art. There are something like 6,000 works of art in the Louvre. It used to be more, but in 1986 when the nearby Musée d'Orsay opened, the collection was split and paintings from the 1848 revolution onwards were moved to the new museum.

We did however get the chance to see the Mona Lisa without the crowds and stand in front of Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece of 16<sup>th</sup> Century portraiture. This is a rare treat since around 6,000,000 visitors view the painting each year. They get about 15 seconds each in front of the picture. The painting is kept behind bullet-proof glass at a constant temperature and humidity.

Alas this has not always been the case and the painting has suffered the indignity of theft and vandalism on several occasions. In 1911 it was taken off the walls and hidden in a broom closet before being carried out under the coat of a self-proclaimed Italian patriot, one Vincenzo Peruggia, who worked at the museum. Several suspects were bought in for questioning and one even tried to implicate Pablo Picasso. Eventually Peruggia was caught when he tried to sell the painting to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. It turned out the painting had been hanging on the wall of Peruggia's nearby flat for the previous two years while the Police had searched all over the world for it.

Filming in the Louvre is by no means easy and it is certainly not cheap. It is against French Law to close a public museum or art gallery on any day other than for routine maintenance works (Tuesdays in the case of the Louvre) The Dan Brown blockbuster film - *The Da Vinci Code* was only allowed to film in the museum at night and paid a very hefty location fee



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## INFORMATION

said to be in the region of \$2.5 million<sup>1</sup> for the privilege. However there has been a benefit to the museum by way of increased visitor numbers, though as the Louvre is already *the world's most visited museum*<sup>2</sup>, it is debatable whether this could be seen as a good thing.

We left the museum and had lunch at a local restaurant where we had more of a chance to discuss what we had seen and to quiz our hosts on the whys and wherefores of filming in Paris. On previous Fam Trips, this has often been a most profitable exercise, when unexpected information comes to light. On this occasion it was the fact that there is an un-used, emergency terminal area at Charles de Gaulle airport, which would be available for filming. Apparently it is kept as a stand-by terminal in the event of a breakdown elsewhere in the airport. This is always important and useful information to be stored away for another time. It would be useful for this area to be included on a future trip to Paris.

After lunch we were taken to the Grand Palais building and the Monet Exhibition. This is a major retrospective of the artist's work and consists of 160 of Monet's impressionist paintings. To be given the chance to see this sell-out exhibition without the crowds and with the assistance of a guide to explain the paintings was a huge treat.

Finally there was just enough time to walk up the Champs Elysee to our coach and head back to the Gard Du Nord station and our journey home.

It is extremely difficult to do Paris justice in just two days. It's a beautifully compact city, which is easy to walk across, but to try and cover all aspects and potential filming areas would take much longer. We missed (partly due to the weather) seeing the streets and squares that make up the Marais and Bastille arrondissements. It would have been interesting to see part of the famous Paris catacombs that lie beneath the city and the interiors of the courtyards and typical Parisian apartments, some of which we glimpsed as we drove along. I for one would have liked to explore the Canal St Martin area more - things for another time and an excuse to flex the credit card next time I am in St. Pancras with my passport and a couple of days to spare.

As ever we are truly grateful to our hosts from the Ile de France Film Commission; Olivier-René Veillon, Stephané Martinet, Constance Cardon and Eric Grebille.

To the Terminus du Nord Hotel, the restaurants and Duc du Lombard Jazz Club for their hospitality.

And to the guides and others who took the time to explain the wonderful buildings at Versailles, the Musée du Louvre and the Grand Palais or who worked late or came in early to open up for us.

Many many thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> source: Wikipedia

<sup>2</sup> 1<sup>st</sup>: Musée de Louvre: 2<sup>nd</sup> British Museum: 3<sup>rd</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. source Wikipedia