

Chateau de Chenonceau: Castles of the Loire Valley

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

France is known for many things -- of course, its capital Paris always springs to mind and its amazing food, but one of its many wonders are the many chateaux dotted around the country. Many can be found scattered through the Loire Valley, as when the French kings started to build here, it became *the* location, with many nobles opting to follow suit.

When we got the opportunity to visit the Loire Valley, I wanted to check out some of these chateaux, as they are almost a quintessential French dream. They've attracted visitors for many years, and one of those who was attracted to the dream elements in their architecture was none other than Walt Disney, who used various ideas he saw at both the Chateau de Chenonceau, which we'll be focusing on in this article, and the Chateau de Chambord, which will be featured in an upcoming article.

When researching the various chateaux, one name kept coming up time and time again as *the* place to see, and that name was Chenonceau, so that's where we started. Like any good chateau or castle, it's got a superb introduction to it, as you wind your way through the grounds, eventually catching glimpses of it in the distance, before seeing it in its full glory. Now I wonder whether that was something that Walt then went on to use in designing Disneyland?

Once you get your tickets in the obligatory gift shop, then it's into a tree-lined avenue, with a wood behind it. You can then choose which route to take through the expansive gardens to head down to the chateau itself. As soon as I spotted that there was a donkey field, I just had to take that route! The gardens are half the attraction of Chenonceau, with some amazing vegetable gardens, surrounded by pink roses, many of them in full bloom. They are quite a sight.

The sights continued as we walked through the 16th century farmhouse area. You could just imagine how life was all that time ago, and this would be the perfect site for a living museum, complete with costumed characters, depicting days gone by.

As you near the chateau, the gardens become more formal, with one each attributed to two of the most formidable women to live here in years gone by. The garden of Catherine de Medici is located to the right of the chateau, as you approach, and is based around a circular pool in

the middle. It's full of classically designed flowerbeds, all laid out in brilliant pinks, surrounded by lavender bushes, and complemented by perfectly shaped shrubs and small trees.

To the left of the chateau is Diane de Poitiers' contribution to Chenonceau, and although again following a classic and symmetrical design, this is across different levels. Each edge of the garden is bordered by retaining walls and terraces, giving it a very different feel than Catherine's garden. White roses creep up these walls, while the central decoration is based on triangles of grass, with what looks like circles of lighter green in the middle. It gives it a flowing feel that you don't find in the other garden. Both gardens must be a maintenance nightmare, with planting taking place twice each year, and something like 40,000 plants grown on the estate each year.

The gardens form a wonderful entrance to the chateau, a beautiful piece of architecture, although sadly it was undergoing a massive renovation when we visited, which does take away from some of its splendour. Of course, it's essential that this is done to ensure the future of the chateau, and they've done their best to minimise disappointment, with hoardings showing how the chateau would have looked. Despite that, we couldn't help but think that we'd rather have seen it once work was completed.

However, the exterior of the chateau is only part of the story, and there's no disruption once you get inside, with plenty to see. We opted to pay a little extra for the video iPod tour, and this proved to be invaluable, taking us on a 45-minute guided tour. They gave us so much information, and unlike some places you visit, the narration was just the right length in almost every room.

It would be impossible to cover every single room here, as there were so many. This truly was a place fit for a king or queen, with the number of rooms to match. The highlight of the tour for many, myself included, was the gallery that stretches over the River Cher, which runs through the property. It was added on by Catherine de Medici, and has some spectacular views over both the river and the formal gardens. It's remarkably simple in design, but that's part of what makes it so eye catching, with a white and black diamond tiling pattern on the floor, white marble walls, and a simple dark timber ceiling.

It's on the second floor of the chateau that we came to what was my favourite room of all. It's an unusual room, as it's sombre, not something you usually expect to find. Louise of Lorraine's bedroom is completed decorated in black, with white designs on the walls, and is a complete contrast to the rest of the chateau. After her husband, King Henri III

was assassinated, she retired to Chenonceau to meditate and pray. Her room was decorated to show her mourning for her dead husband. It's a sad story, but a beautiful way to pay tribute to him.

A visit to the chateau will cost €10.50 for adults, and €8.50 for children aged 7 to 18 years old. If you want to add in the video iPod tour of the chateau, as we did, then the price goes up to €14.50/adults, and €12.50/children. Children under the age of seven are admitted free of charge. The Chateau de Chenonceau is open throughout the year, although with different opening times, depending on the time of year you visit. For more information, visit Chenonceau.com. It's located around two hours outside of Paris, and can easily be reached either by car or train.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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