

Outside the Périphérique

We have included a number of sights and places of interest away from the centre of Paris. Some, like Versailles, are classic tourist spots, others are included in order to provide you with a choice of things to do and see. Most of the places detailed here are fairly ‘accessible’.

They are listed covering the closest ones to the city first, so the order is:

- **la Défense**
- **Vincennes**
- **St-Germain-en-Laye**
- **the basilica at St Denis**
- **the Musée de l’Air et de l’Espace at le Bourget**
- **Versailles**
- **the Disney complex (Disneyland Paris and the Studios)**
- **Parc Astérix**
- **the château at Fontainebleau**

La Défense

La Défense (*website*: www.ladefense.fr) is an exciting development to the west of Porte Maillot. The buildings appear to have been part of a competition in architectural adventurism and while it is first and foremost an international business centre, it is also an interesting place to visit. There are great contrasts between the ultra modern Grande Arche; the huge bustling shopping/restaurant area in the *Quatre Temps* shopping centre, and the relatively tiny church, Nôtre Dame de Pentecôte, nestling alongside the CNIT building.

Everything is surrounded by skyscraper office blocks.

The view from the top of the Grande Arche is magnificent, and the area is included in the *Recommended itineraries* chapter, based on the detailed description here. The main esplanade called the Parvis is in the centre of the development and slopes very gently downwards towards Paris. This means that you have a view over the city from anywhere along it.

The area is run by **EPAD** (Établissement Public d’Aménagement de la Région de la Défense) which have their offices at **Tour Areva, place de la Coupole, la Défense 6, 92084**.

Although it is a relatively new complex, access has been surprisingly

badly thought out, and working out the potential ramped/lift routes was a minor nightmare for our surveyors.

We found one hotel where the only step-free access was from the UGCP. All the pedestrian routes to it involved steps! We found another hotel which only had step-free access during office hours and on weekdays, as the route depended on certain commercial buildings being open.

Nevertheless, there are ways to get around to most places, even for an electric chair user, but they are not well signed nor wholly obvious.

Encouragingly, between two visits five months apart, signage in *Quatre Temps* had improved considerably.

Surprisingly perhaps, EPAD are already discussing some major rejuvenation of the area, and there is information about this on their website.

The Information Centre *Info La Défense* is in a building located on the central Parvis area past the right hand corner of the CNIT centre and a further 50m past the red, iron, arched sculpture named Calder's Stabile.

Maps of la Défense, produced by *Mobile-en-Ville (MeV)*, **showing colour coded step-free routes and lifts** within the blvd Circulaire, are available from *Info La Défense*. The MeV map was published in 2003 and seems to be very reliable.

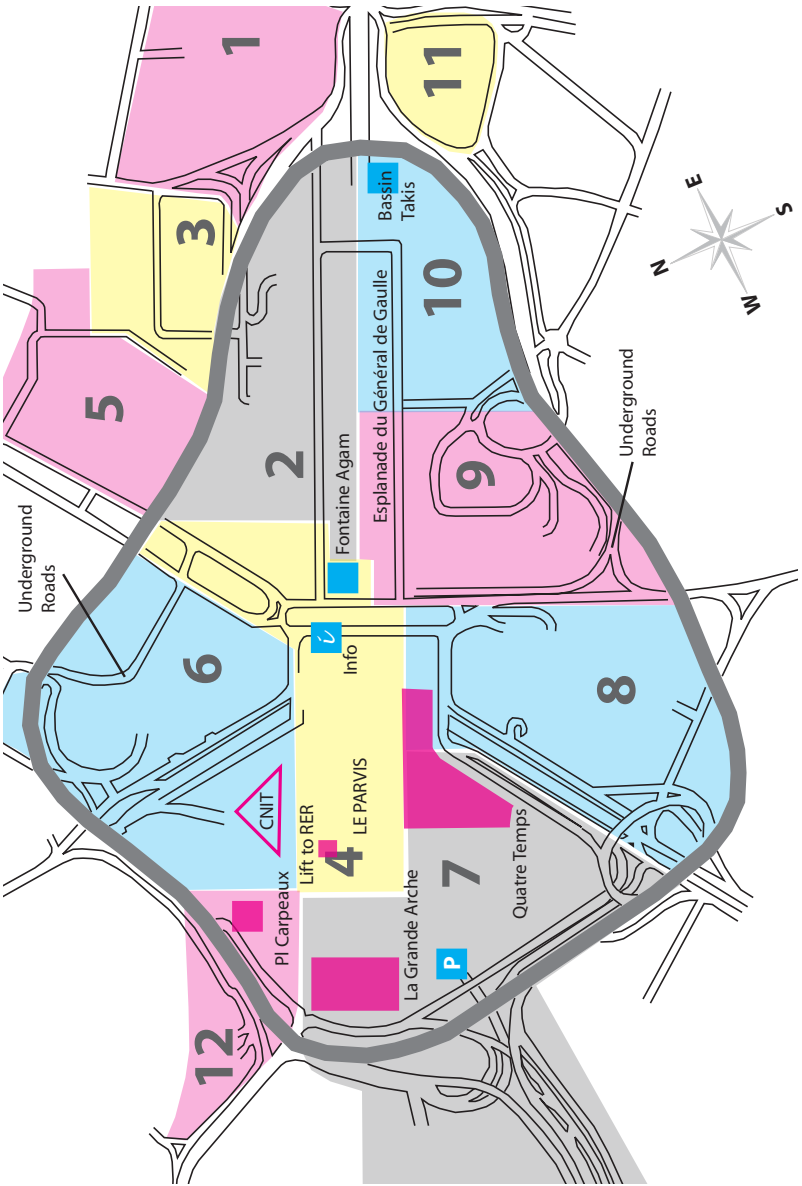
There are also maps which can be printed off from the la Défense website, but these are quite small, and not sufficiently detailed for many uses.

These maps **do**, however, show where the various numbered areas are, and can help in choosing an appropriate CP.

The map shows the location of the main places of interest and of the underground roads.

Getting to la Défense

If you come on the RER, there is lift access from the platform to the ticket hall and foyer, which is huge. Go to Exit A alongside the SNCF information/reservation office where a lift (D75 W100 L200) will take you up to the Parvis, the main open air concourse. It has an intercom at the top to summon attention when you want to go down. From the concourse, if you want to go up the Grande Arche to the top, the route is signed, as described in the write-up below.



La Défense
Showing the underground roads

For the *Quatre Temps* shopping centre from the RER use the signed exit from the ticket hall, then go across part of level minus one in the UGCP for about 40m, following the signs for 'les Arcades'. Go through another set of doors, and then you will find some lifts on your left to take you up into the complex.

If you start from the Parvis (on the surface), use the ramped entrances well over to the left of *Quatre Temps* at Porte du Parvis/Porte Bordelieu Nord to avoid the +3+3 stepped split level which runs along most of the face of the centre.

To get back to the RER you can either use the Arcade lifts to level minus one of the CP, which is at the ticket hall level, or the lift from the Parvis near the left side of the CNIT centre.

Arriving by car you will come along the blvd Circulaire which goes right round the area. As you come over the pont de Neuilly, from central Paris, you will pass the Novotel hotel on your right. The signposting is quite difficult to pick up, because there is so much of it. However, various parking/business areas are numbered 1 to 8. Parking for the Grande Arche and *Quatre Temps* is signed in sector 7, which is some way round. When you find it you have to choose between Park A(left) and Park B(right). It is probably best to choose Park B, from which the lifts bring you up in the middle of *Quatre Temps*.

There is also a drop-off point, useful if coming by taxi, at place Carpeaux (so called because of the large sculpture of a thumb). This is located behind the CNIT centre and allows step-free access to the Parvis. To get to place Carpeaux, follow the blvd Circulaire around until the Sofitel Hotel is on your right. The turnoff is the signed in brown as for *Taxis, La Grande Arche, CNIT*. It is not possible to park there, as it is only suitable for a brief stop.

When you are using any of the UGCPs it is essential to write down the number of your parking area and its colour and to remember which floor it is on! The CP under *Quatre Temps* is about the size of Wembley stadium (or feels like it), and there are four levels. Each has its own colour, and the sectors are then defined by numbers. If you don't remember where your car is, you could spend hours looking it. There are relatively few BB spaces.

Exits from the CP are reasonably well signed, and will put you back somewhere on the blvd Circulaire, but you need to have worked out which signs you need to follow when you leave.

If you are staying in either the ETAP or Ibis hotels at Courbevoie, the Esplanade Metro station is about a 20-25 minutes walk away, from where you can take Line 1 to La Défense proper. Both these stations are 'accessible'. Leaving by the back exit of the hotel onto rue Victor Hugo, turn left and walk for 15-20 minutes towards the high rise buildings of la Défense. Victor Hugo extends into rue Louis Blanc and at the corner with ave d'Alsace you will reach a purple elevator column. Two lifts (D110 W150 L205) bring you to the elevated walkways from where it is about a 400m step-free walk, following signs, to the Esplanade and Metro.

Grande Arche de la Défense

1 parvis de la Défense, 92040

Tel: 01 49 07 27 57

website: www.grandearche.com e-mail: tourisme@grandearche.com

The Grande Arche is an enormous, hollow cube 106m high offering a superb view of the skyline over Paris. The hollow part is so big that it could contain the towers of Notre Dame and it is as wide as the Champs Elysées. From the top, the *Grand Axis* of main boulevards and major buildings – the Arc de Triomphe, Louvre, Concorde and Champs Elysées – is clear, but what you may not expect is the other alignment with the Eiffel Tower and the Montparnasse Tower, although a new skyscraper seems to have blocked this off.

The Arche is located at the west end of the la Défense central boulevard and is impossible to miss. **The massive flight of steps, +54 without handrails, looks daunting and not very access friendly!** Tickets are sold at the top of the flight of steps which is the main concourse under the Arch.

The steps can, however, be bypassed, though only by using a lift from underneath the concourse, although this depends on someone answering the intercom provided. **If you have come on the RER** and used Exit A with the lift to the Parvis, you will be close to the Arche. **The wheelchair (step-free) route is reasonably well signed, and shown on a diagram by the lift exit.** It goes down a ramp and through some doors by an RER exit into the buildings complex under the Arche, and then through several well-signed corridors. It is about 300m from the RER lift. Opposite the central spiral staircase is a circular lift (D100, diameter 170) which will take you to the Grande Arche main concourse/platform level at the top of the 54 steps. There is an intercom to ask someone to send the lift down. Be warned: you may have to be patient and/or send someone up to the

ticket office to demand attention, as the intercom isn't always answered quickly.

If you come via Quatre Temps UGCP, use either the Porte Boieldieu Nord or Porte du Parvis exits, make your way diagonally across the Parvis to where the RER lift comes up, and then follow the route described above. The distance from UGCP to the Grande Arche lift would be at least 600m.

From the main concourse at the top of the 54 steps, four lifts each taking about sixteen people go to the upper level. When you leave the lift, a steep ramp bypassing +4 steps will take you to the exhibition halls where it is step-free throughout. Behind the lifts there is a bar area and +6 with a platform stairlift to bypass them. If you take this option, it gives step-free access to the unisex **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST120 SH56)** about 50m to your right at the end of the corridor. A key is needed to get into the toilet, available from the staff. However, we got in using the end of a spoon! Mens toilets involve +10 steps, and womens a further +10.

To reach the outside viewing area there is a platform stairlift bypassing the +35 steps. This was out of order when we visited in 2005. Platform stairlifts of this length are notoriously unreliable, and it might be worth an e-mail enquiry shortly before you visit to check on availability. When we checked later, we were told that the stairlift was working again. It is all quite good in principle, but disabled people depend very much on finding a staff member to operate such special systems, and there may be reluctance to operate the stairlift for elderly people and disabled walkers who might find the steps far too difficult. It is a place where you might consider taking an 'occasionally used' chair if you have one, as this may smooth your path in more ways than one.

La Défense central boulevard

This runs from the Grande Arche and the Parvis to the Bassin Takis overlooking the pont de Neuilly. The esplanade is over 1km long and its length is deceptive because of the huge skyscrapers. Finding the accessible routes you may end up snaking from side to side using various ramps. There is, however, an almost direct route that runs along the left side of the esplanade heading towards the Bassin Takis lake. In the centre of the boulevard, the monumental Fontaine Agam produces a fine water display, with both illuminations and music at certain times. At the far end, the Bassin Takis provides a 'mirror' of water to reflect the skyscrapers

and at night, the dozens of multi-coloured lights. On a clear day there is a magnificent view both back at the Arch and over Paris. If, having walked down the esplanade, you don't fancy the walk back up hill, you can make use of the 'accessible' station Esplanade de la Défense (see *Getting Around*). Unfortunately, you can't actually go anywhere on the Metro from this station step-free except back to the la Défense station, and from there, you can take the RER into town.

Les Quatre Temps shopping centre

15 Parvis de la Défense, 92092

Tel: 01 47 73 54 44 Fax: 01 47 76 36 72

website: www.les4temps.com/vue/InitHomepage.do

Quatre Temps is a huge American style shopping mall with some two hundred and fifty shops on three floors, over a massive UGCP. It is particularly large, and is almost a small town within la Défense itself. There is a massive Auchan hypermarket, with inclined moving walkways for both trolleys and chairs. Elsewhere in the complex there are large branches of C&A, Virgin and Toys R Us among many others. There are also dozens of cafés and restaurants, ranging from fast food joints to the occasional upmarket establishment. If coming from Parking B and arriving at Place des Arcades there is an information point *where you can pick up a pocket sized guide to the centre*, which marks the lifts and toilets.

As described in the introduction to la Défense, there are four levels in the UGCP, which is split into areas A and B. From the CP there are three sets of lifts and escalators. Each has two lifts (D110 W180 L110) which will take you to level 0 of the shopping centre.

Having reached Level 0, where there are only a few shops, it is necessary to cross to the other side of the escalators and take different lifts to shopping levels 1 and 2, from where there is step-free access throughout. There is one lift in each area (D110 W120 L180). There is a lift dedicated to Toys R Us near to place des Miroirs.

Access from the Parvis is easiest through the large entrances of porte du Parvis and porte Boieldieu Nord. Although furthest from la Grande Arche they are both ramped gently to bypass +3 steps, unlike those at the other end by the Auchan hypermarket, which are ramped very steeply to bypass +10. If coming from the RER you can follow the route as described in the introduction to la Défense to reach level 0 of place des Arcades and then continue as laid out above.

There are **toilets** in the areas named *place des Arcades* and *place de l'Arc en Ciel*. **Wheelchair cubicles** in the general toilets, separate for male and female, were locked but there should be staff on duty to open them. If not, the 'Espaces bébés/familles' directly next door were always open, and have **wheelchair toilets (D85 ST65 SH50)**.

NB: In the main shopping area above it was often signed that the third lift area, *place des Miroirs*, had toilets as well. When we visited in 2005, it didn't. Another wheelchair cubicle is located in the restaurant area on level two. However, if locked and there is no member of staff present, there is no family area to use instead.

World Trade Centre (CNIT)

This is a massive building with shops and services. It is mainly geared towards the various exhibitions and conferences held there, but there is a huge public ground floor area before you get to the turnstiles into the exhibition areas. There is a wheelchair toilet on the ground floor. As you come into the building from the Parvis, keep over to the right. About 40m inside the hall, there's a corridor off to the right, with toilets on the right hand side, just past the post office area (that is what was there when we visited). The **wheelchair toilet/cubicles (D70+ ST70+ SH48)** are in the 'public' area of the building.

Notre Dame de Pentecôte

1 place de la Défense,

Postal address: 1 ave de la division Leclerc, 92880 Puteaux

Tel: 01 47 75 83 25 Fax: 01 47 75 83 26

website: <http://catholiques.aladefense.cef.fr/>

e-mail: ecrire@catholiques.aladefense.cef.fr

A church catering mostly for the workers of the business district. In addition to regular services, there is an exhibition and there are occasional concerts. It is located to the right of the CNIT building and a large wooden cross outside leads the way to a grey, untypical but interesting church, with a ramp to bypass +3 steps at the **entrance**. A lift inside (D75 W100 L135) leads to a lovely modern church on the first floor and down to meeting rooms and a **wheelchair toilet (D75 ST100 SH48)** in the basement.

Vincennes

Bois de Vincennes

This is an enormous area just outside the south-eastern section of the Périphérique. There is a large park, a party ruined château, a zoo, a lake and floral gardens as well as a Buddhist temple and a stadium. The park stretches some 4km east-west and more than 2km north-south covering an area of nearly 1000ha. There's an excellent map in the Michelin Green Guide.

The RER stations Fontenay-sous-Bois and Vincennes both have large lifts, but the distances involved between the sights mean that this is really best visited by car. Quieter, more relaxing and less 'disturbed' than parts of the Bois de Boulogne, it is ideal for a day out.

The area around the main lake is one of the more pleasant sunbathing spots in Paris, although this is probably not the place for you if you are put off by topless sunbathers.

The park itself is pretty flat with lots of tarmac paths and there is plenty of parking on the roads which run through the park. Surveys are included of the main sights and facilities. The only accessible toilet that does not require paying entrance to one of the sites is in the Vélodrome.

The Château

Tel: 01 48 08 31 20 *Fax:* 01 58 64 23 95

website: www.chateau-vincennes.fr

This is in the northern part of the park, near the RER station. There is a good model showing the extent of the old château on the website. Little remains of the castles, except the 16thC Chapelle Royale, the massive Tour du Village (tower) and the impressive 14thC Donjon (keep).

There is a CP at the south entrance on the Esplanade Sant Louis; there is then a 400m walk to the ticket office and shop located near the north entrance. There are +50+70+150 steps to the top of the keep and +9 into the chapel, but they can only be visited as part of an organised tour, and can hardly be described as being 'accessible'.

Parc Floral de Paris (Paris Floral Garden)

Esplanade du Château de Vincennes, route de la Pyramide, 75012

website: www.parcfloraldeparis.com (In French only)

The Parc Floral is situated near the Château, and extends over an area some 800m by 500m (or about 30ha). The garden and special display

pavilions were created for the 1969 Flower Show. The houses have an interesting series of small exhibitions, such as 'Paris trees', Bonsai plants, cacti, rhododendrons, and tropical ferns. There is a children's playground and altogether presents a pleasant visit with flowers always in bloom in the Jardin des Quatres Saisons. In the summer months there are a number of classical and jazz concerts.

There are two entrances, both with step-free access, at esplanade du Château de Vincennes *Entrée Château* and on rue de la Pyramides *Entrée Nymphéas*. There is parking either 200m away outside the Château or closer along the rue de la Pyramides on rough ground. **Once inside, most of the garden area is fairly level with either tarmac or gravel paths.** A train with a 40cm step can be used to go around the park and avoid some of the long distances, but passengers need to be able to transfer to a seat. About half of the houses with plants or exhibitions have flat access throughout. The remainder normally have a ramp bypassing the +2 or +3 steps either at the exit or entrance. Some backtracking is therefore necessary, but the houses are quite small.

The Bosquet restaurant has step-free access.

There are two designated **adapted toilets (D70 ST40 SH50)** in the mens, located to the left of the *Entrée Chateau*, and in the centre of the park.

The third toilet, marked as being between the two entrances, did not seem to exist.

Parc Zoologique Paris (Zoological Garden)

53 ave de St Maurice, 75012

Tel: 01 44 75 20 00

website: www.mnhn.fr (from this home page there is a link to the Zoo de Vincennes)

About 2km from the château this garden houses a number of interesting animals. It was once the largest zoo in France. There have, however, been significant changes in public attitude to the keeping of wild animals in zoos, and these are reflected in the composition of the current collection.

There are four entrances and parking on the surrounding roads is fairly easy. There was one BB space on ave de Ceinture du Lac Daumesnil close to the porte de Paris on ave Daumesnil, which also seems to be the main entrance.

The animals and birds there were varied enough to make an interesting and informative visit. All were outside when we were there, and could be seen step-free, and from wheelchair eyelevel. The 72m high rock has a lift but it is permanently closed and staff said there were no plans to fix it.

There are +352 steps if you fancy the view from the top.

There was a café beside the empty elephant house with movable chairs and tables.

There are at least two **wheelchair toilets (D78 ST90 SH48)** in the middle of the park which are reasonably well signed.

Centre Bouddhique (Buddhist Centre)

website: www.centrebouddhique.net (from which you can find the Paris centre)

The Centre is housed in one of the pavillions built for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, and has a 9m high statue of the Buddha. When we visited in the early 1990s, the building was open, but in 2006, it seemed to be closed to visits from the public, except on feast days in April and October. There is a small step into the main temple with the big statue, but many steps (we were told) to get into the smaller temple which is Tibetan and is home to the International Buddhist Institute.

Lac Daumesnil

The name comes from a famous general who stoutly led the defenders of the Vincennes castle against invaders on several occasions early in the 19thC. The area around the lake is largely flat with plenty of paths and benches, some of which are right along the water's edge. There is a restaurant, *Chalets des Isles*, on the western of the central islands, which is accessible by road from near the Buddhist temple on the south side of the lake. It has a large flat terrace, +1 step into the interior with movable chairs and tables and unadapted toilets via +2 steps (D62 no ST). Next to the restaurant there is step-free access to a crazy golf course and children's playground.

Vélodrome J Anquetil

Located south of Lac Daumesnil on the ave de Gravelle between porte de Charenton and ave de Maréchal. There is a large CP with one BB space and flat access to the stadium. There is a large, flat area between the stadium seats and the track which we were told could be occupied by wheelchair users to watch races. The stadium seats themselves are reached via many steps. The restaurant has +1 step with movable tables and chairs. There is a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST70 SH50)** to the left of the entrance, 10m past the information and ticket office.

St-Germain-en-Laye

The town starts just across the road from the château. It's quite attractive and has some pedestrianised areas. However, there are some quite narrow pavements, and many small shops have +1 step at the entrance.

Located to the west of Paris, Saint-Germain-en-Laye is served by an 'accessible' RER station (see chapter on *Getting around*). This has a large lift operated by the RER staff which leads to a ramp 50m down the road from the château entrance.

There is parking on the road opposite the château, in a somewhat busy and congested area, but alternatively there is an UGCP by the RER station. You need to park on level minus three from which there is a lift to the RER station and thereafter a lift to street level. Other CP lifts are painfully small (W<60cm).

Château de St-Germain-en-Laye

place Charles de Gaulle, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 78105

Tel: 01 39 10 13 00

website: www.musee-antiquitenationales.fr Closed Tuesdays

This small (100m by 50m) Renaissance château with its adjacent gardens are an attractive and generally highly accessible site. It has a varied history, several associations with the British Royal Family and contains the Musée des Antiquités Nationales (National Museum of Antiquities).

The entrance to the site has 30m of cobbles and leads either to the gardens or the château.

Château. Flat entrance. The museum is spread over three floors with a lift (D90 W135 L200) connecting each floor and flat or ramped access everywhere. The lift is behind closed doors and used with staff assistance. From the entrance, the ticket office and a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST70 SH50)** are located down the left hand side of the courtyard. To the right there is a small free, step-free exhibition and the chapel with -3 steps from the gravelled courtyard. The first floor contains many antiquities from Greek, Roman and Egyptian times.

Wheelchairs are available from next to the toilet. There is seating throughout the museum and the exhibits are all at wheelchair eye level. It should be noted that strenuous efforts have been made to make this building accessible and the staff were particularly helpful.

Jardin Anglais (English Garden). Running north from the château the garden offers panoramic views of the Paris Basin, particularly from the terrace above the Seine which is 500m from the entrance. After the cobbles, access is generally good although the surfaces are rough. The garden is about 500m square, with kiosk and an upmarket restaurant. The toilets in the garden are not accessible to wheelchair users.

Saint-Denis

Basilique de Saint-Denis

1 rue de la Légion d'honneur, 93200 Saint-Denis

Tel: 01 48 09 83 54 Fax: 01 48 09 82 80

website: www.monum.fr

Re-built in the 12th and 13thCs over the foundations of an earlier abbey, St Denis is generally regarded as the birthplace of the Gothic style in European church architecture. It was developed by Abbot Suger into a highly influential centre of ecclesiastical learning. From 996 all but three of the French kings' bodies lay buried here, until the ransacking of their tombs at the time of the revolution. Its restoration in the 19thC added important displays of monumental art, and the gothic facades of the cathedral remain undiminished.

Located in the centre of town, there are 2 BB spaces directly outside the cathedral entrance and four more elsewhere on place Victor Hugo. There is parking about 200m away.

The main entrance has +1 [12cm] step through the wooden door and then +4 with a temporary ramp. Inside there are -4 into the nave, although a ramp is available. Ramped access from the nave takes you to the cash desk in the garden on the south side from where the crypt and high altar are accessible. The crypt is reached via the exhibition area, which has mens and womens **wheelchair toilets (D70 ST75 SH55)**, then after a 50m walk around the east end to a staff operated open lift (W88 L135). From the bottom there is step-free access to the graves of Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette and Louis VIII amongst others. Note that in the crypt there is no seating and the lighting is rather dim. The Ossuary, which contains more royal remains, is reached through a 60cm wide passage. Access back to the church is via the open lift from where the chancel and ambulatory are +16 with handrails, and medieval garden is +8 from the exhibition area.

le Bourget

Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace (Museum of Air and Space)

Aéroport de Paris-Le Bourget, BP 173, 93352 Le Bourget

Tel: 01 49 92 70 62

website: www.mae.org e-mail: musee.air@mae.org

Located just north of St Denis, this museum dedicated to all matters aeronautical. It is on a small airfield in which the old hangers have been converted into exhibition halls. Le Bourget was the main airport for Paris for half a century, until the construction of CDG.

There is a large CP with six BB spaces.

Step-free entrance. The building extends some 250m in either direction from the entrance. The halls are largely step-free allowing most exhibits to be viewed from GF level. The ones reached via steps are described below.

To the right is the area with the early planes. To the left, the exhibitions are reached by an open lift (W90 L150) to bypass +5 steps. The satellites in the Space Hall are reached via +21 and some further exhibits have +18 more and then +16+16 for more still. A mock-up cockpit in the Military and Commercial Aircraft Hall is +8; however, the Hall of Light and Sporting Aviation is step-free.

Access to get into the Boeing 747 and Concorde involves +25 and +40 steps respectively and the doors are narrow.

There are **wheelchair cubicles (D70+ ST90+ SH45)** in the womens and mens toilets in all three halls; however, the ones in the Space Hall allow limited turning space.

There is step-free access to the café and to the planetarium, which has four chair spaces.

Versailles

Versailles is about 20km from Paris, with a magnificent chateau and gardens, and some huge grounds in which the two Trianons and an ornamental lake are situated. The town grew up as a result of the court presence, to house civil and domestic servants, and much needed gardeners. The palace acted as the government's headquarters for about a century, prior to the Revolution in 1789.

We found two **wheelchair toilets** in the town, both in McDonalds. One is in the branch in rue du Maréchal Foch, on the right-hand side of the counter. It is signed and unisex (D88 ST110). The other is in the branch opposite Versailles-Rive-Gauche RER line C station, rue Royale (D70+, ST70+).

You really need to decide first whether to concentrate on the chateau, or to concentrate on the grounds and gardens, possibly using the motorised train or one of the electric vehicles described later and perhaps visiting the Trianons. If you want the train or an electric vehicle, you would be wise to book - or at least to ask the 'access' team about booking. Have a look at the maps and diagrams in a good guidebook, or on the website.

Getting there

You are likely to arrive at Versailles in a **car, a taxi or an adapted minibus**, or if you can cope, by train (see the chapter on *Getting around*). This is a visit that might just justify the expense of hiring your own adapted transport. You can then organise going both to the chateau, and to the Trianons and the lakeside, taking in some of the gardens as well.

Versailles is reached via porte St Cloud on the A13 motorway, leaving at exit 14.

There are CPs outside the main chateau entrance, and in the grounds near the Trianons.

Parking for the château is outside the main gates, immediately in front of the palace. Car parking is on the left side and coach parking on the right. From the parking area there is some 400m to go, much of it over a rough cobbled surface. As from September 2006 disabled visitors will be able to approach the Palace via a smooth walkway in the main courtyard, thus avoiding the cobbles.

If there are disabled passengers in the vehicle, or if the driver is disabled, you should be allowed to drive right into the palace courtyard, and get quite close to where you go into the building or through the arches into the gardens. In view of the distances involved, this is a valuable facility. To get there, go up the road between the car and coach parking areas which is initially marked 'no entry'. Just inside before the main gate there is an information point a control point. A gendarme will check your blue badge and direct you towards non-

designated car parking on the right of the main courtyard area which has marked provision for 3 BB holders. In principle, the spaces inside are reserved for disabled drivers, and if the vehicle has an able-bodied driver, then a disabled passenger can be dropped off, and the car then parked in the public CP at the place d'Armes just outside. This is near entrance H. We found the officials to be most helpful, and when we explained that we were going to drop off two disabled passengers, they radioed for someone to meet us further up.

With a little gentle persuasion we were allowed to park our minibus in the Cour des Princes (Princes' Court), which would be our recommended spot for disabled drivers to use too.

There is a real problem with the public parking areas if you're in a minibus, since the CP on the left has a strict 2.1m height restriction with bars over the gates. This means that if you're in a minibus or a car with an elevated roof, you can't get in. The coach park on the right is strictly (and bureaucratically) for coaches only. As you can see, we managed to get permission to park our minibus inside the grounds, but the 'formal' arrangements are not good. You might have a problem if there were several minibuses there at one time.

To get there by train, go by SNCF from Gare St Lazare to Versailles' Gare Rive Droite, rue du Maréchal Foch. You need to buy a ticket from the 'Banlieue' ticket booths (24 to 29), which are opposite the international service desk, roughly in the middle of the station concourse. A regular service leaves from the Banlieue platforms (1 to 6) and it is a small step with a 20cm gap. Although ramps are meant to be available, there was a distinct absence of station staff to provide you with one. The journey takes about 30 minutes. At Versailles, after a similar -1 step from the train, there is a lift (D95 W95 L105) from the end of platforms 3 and 4 down to the ticket hall and street level. From here it is about 1km to the palace itself. Although RER line C also takes you to Versailles, in this case Gare Rive Gauche presents some serious access problems.

Versailles, Chateau and Gardens

Tel: 01 30 84 74 00 or 01 30 84 76 76

Disabled access information line: 01 30 83 75 05 *Fax:* 01 30 83 77 90

website: www.chateauversailles.fr with pages in English

e-mail: handicap@chateauversailles.fr

The Château is closed on Mondays, although the Gardens are open every day.

On various Saturdays and Sundays through the summer, there are fountain displays with musical and aquatic entertainments, sometimes with fireworks. These can be spectacular, in the setting of the gardens and artificial lakes. Information on these can be obtained from:

Château de Versailles-Spectacles,

1 bis rue Robert de Cotte, 78000 Versailles

Tel: 01 30 83 78 88

Versailles is the largest royal palace in Europe and probably the most magnificent, built on a truly monumental scale. It has spectacular gardens which are beautifully kept.

After our visit we contacted those responsible for ‘access’, and found them to be very helpful. There is useful information on the website which you can download before your visit, some of it about ‘access’. There’s also an excellent map/plan in the Michelin Green Guide. If you e-mail the ‘access’ team, they will post you additional maps and plans, in English if you want. This can include an interesting and extensive wheelchair accessible route around the Marie-Antoinette ‘Domaine’ in the gardens around the Trianons.

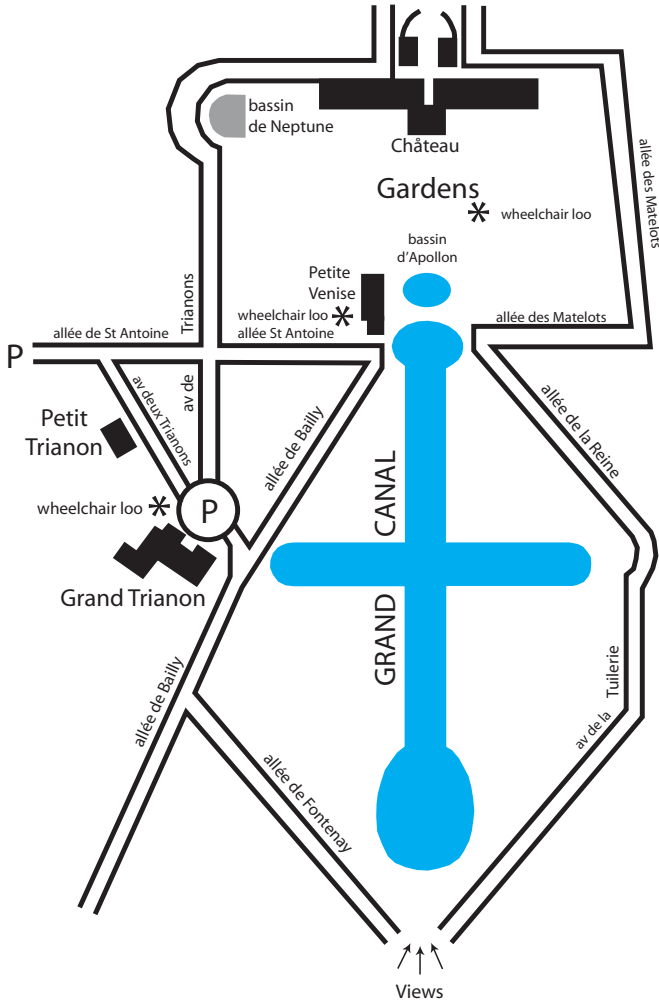
The palace and gardens are unbelievably huge and it is important not to try to see too much. For this reason, we would advise some planning. The palace itself is about 500m wide and the buildings are more than 200m ‘deep’ in places. The main gardens extend some 800m (from the palace to the Bassin d’Apollon), and they are about 1km wide while further away the grounds are more than 2km wide.

Then the Grand Canal is some 1.5km long with the Petit Canal across it is about 1km.

The Grand and Petit Trianon buildings are more than 1.5km from the palace.

Wherever you go, long distances are involved. In the palace there are lifts to and from the first floor, so you can see most of the most famous bits. The staff we spoke to recommended late afternoon as the least crowded time for visiting, as during peak times disabled visitors may have problems manoeuvring amidst the crowds inside. If you have particular interests the staff also suggested ringing to check on which parts of the building are open, as renovation frequently results in the closure of certain sections. During one of our visits the famous Hall of Mirrors was being refurbished.

Note that there are only four disabled person's toilets. One is in the chateau, one in the main gardens, one by Petit Venise at the end of the Grand Canal, and the fourth by the Grand Trianon. You need to know exactly where they are, and may need to plan your day taking their location into account



VERSAILLES CHATEAU AND GARDENS

The designated entrance for disabled visitors to the chateau is entrance H, which is signed and located underneath an archway to the right of the central courtyard and roughly 20m past entrance B2. The mirrored double doors have no step, though you may need to ring the bell or knock, so that the staff know that you are there.

The Palace

At entrance H we found that the staff were helpful and some spoke good English. There are eight wheelchairs available for use, but they are only for visiting the palace, and **cannot be taken into the gardens**.

A lift (D120 W190 L79) goes to the first floor.

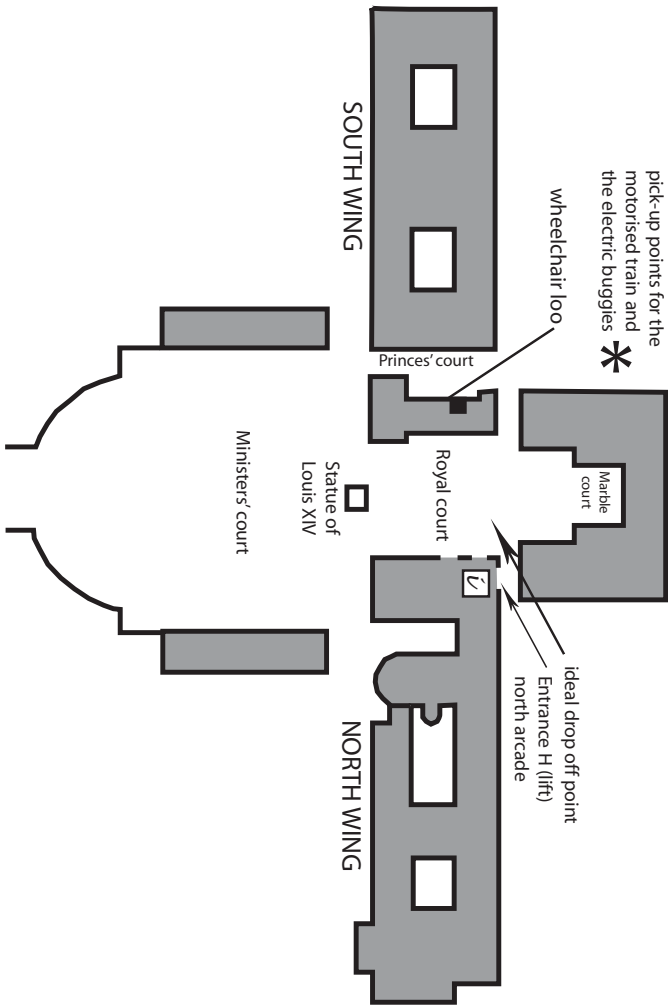
Various parts of the Palace can be visited. There are different entry and exit points but only some areas are accessible without steps. Disabled visitors may need to do some 'doubling back' to facilitate using the lifts.

One survey team did the tour of the State Apartments and the Hall of Mirrors. The lift by entrance H joins the start of the tour of the State Apartments. Once on this floor, access to all rooms is step-free and there were only a few very gentle ramps. Some of the rooms had dim lighting due to reconstruction work obstructing the window and large parts of the Hall of Mirrors were closed for renovation work due to be completed in 2007. At the end of the tour of the state apartments a second lift (D100 W100 L235) took us back to the GF, with step-free access to the garden on the left hand side of the palace.

In the tour of the King's Chamber, the route through Louis XIV's apartments includes rooms on both the ground and first floors. The same lift/s are used, and a door roughly half way along the Hall of Mirrors is used as the entry point to the first floor rooms. The rooms on the GF are only accessible step-free through the golden coloured gate just to the right of entrance C2. This is not usually open, but members of staff are happy to help and guide you in the Dauphin's and Dauphine's rooms.

We tried to visit the Parliament Museum which is 50m to the left of the lift which serves as an exit from the state apartments. According to the brochure it should be accessible; however, neither our survey team nor the staff on the door were able to identify a step-free entrance or exit. There are +13 steps at the entrance and -3-9 at the exit.

The museum contains a history of French parliaments since the revolution, and an assembly hall which is still occasionally used by the government.



VERSAILLES CHATEAU

In 2007, we are told that four 'accessible' tours should be available in the Palace:

- the State Apartments and King's Chamber
- the Chapel and the Opera (though note that visiting the Opera involves steps)

- the apartments of the Dauphin, the Crown Prince
- the Apartments of Mesdames, the daughters of Louis XVth.

There is only one adapted toilet (D79 ST75) by the Palace itself. It is located in the Prince's Courtyard, directly opposite the exit from the State Apartments Tour. We have called this one 'adapted' as the space is quite constrained. When we visited, there was a small handrail on the wall, but no basin nor even a toilet seat! Some chair users might feel that they need to reverse in.

Also in the Prince's Court is the bookshop, (D68cm) and step-free.

The only café is located to the left of entrance A, on the right side of the Palace opposite the chapel. However, it is in the basement, and the only entrance is via +3–20–4 steps.

Gardens

These are magnificent, especially at certain times of the year. Entrance is free except at weekends and some public holidays from April 1st to October 1st when the fountain display is held. The gardens are massive, as described earlier and even a fleeting tour by foot might take upwards of a couple hours. You can get an idea of their size from the Michelin Ile-de-France Guide which allows three hours for a 'quick' tour.

The garden area near the palace has gravelled paths, but the rest are fairly smooth with packed earth. Most of the main paths are step-free, and the whole area is fairly level, although it slopes steadily down to the Canal. Where steps exist, ramps tend to have been provided, although your initiative may be stretched finding some of them. We didn't attempt to make a detailed map as it would have taken too long.

There is a steepish slope from the Water Gardens by the palace down to the Apollo Basin by the Grand Canal which may be difficult for some chair users, but the atmosphere and view from the upper section surrounding the rear of the palace will leave a lasting impression.

One notable area which isn't ramped is the Orangerie, which has great staircases with –100 steps. We were told that from September 2006 a lift situated on the north terrace, will allow access to the gardens there.

There is a step-free route through the Bosquet de la Reine, bypassing a good number of steps, and the implication of this is that there must be a significant slope.

There are a few cafés and brasseries within the gardens with movable

chairs or bench seating. There are also a few benches within the gardens, but not very many.

There are **adapted cubicles (D80 ST65 SH45) in both the womens and mens toilets** near the entrance to the Bosquet de Dauphin, and these seem to be the only ones in the main part of the gardens.

One excellent facility is that self-drive 4-seater golf buggies can be hired from the entrance on the gardens side near the Princes Court. **There are three wheelchair accessible buggies**, which have a flat area of 100cm by 100cm, ramp W85 and cost €20 /hour. There's another one available from the boat-hire shed to the right of the Grand Canal. The main departure point is from the Parterre Sud.

They can be reserved by *e-mail*: astel78@wanadoo.fr
or by *Fax*: 01 39 66 98 76.

They are self drive, and run on a GPS (ground positioning satellite) circuit. Booking is strongly advised.

Alternatively, a motorised train goes around the gardens, leaving from the North Terrace just through the arch from entrance H to the château at the Parterre Sud. It circumnavigates the entire gardens, canal and Trianons. This was unadapted for chair users when we visited, but side transfer would be possible for the more agile, and staff are happy to look after your chair while you are on the train. In 2007, we are told that there would be space for a wheelchair on the new trains, but as there is no ramp, staff members will lift you on and off. **The train is highly recommended.**

Trianons

The two Trianons are located 1.5km from the palace, to the right of the Grand Canal. They formed local 'retreats' where the king could get away from the formality (and supervision) of the Court in the main chateau.

They have their own small CP at the place d'Armes just outside the Grand Trianon with four BB spaces, or can be reached on foot, by electric buggy, mini-train or even horse and cart.

The entrance to the **Grand Trianon** has a ramp to bypass +3 steps. Wheelchairs are available for use in the building. Inside it is all on one floor, though tiled and rather slippery with some seats. There are -7 steps to the gardens.

There is a unisex **wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST90)** just outside the mens toilet, in the Sunken Lane, 150m from the main gates. You may need to get the attendant to unlock the door.

The **Petit Trianon** is some 300m from the Grand Trianon. It is accessed via +1 step. There are a few kitchen exhibits on the GF, but the main interest is the rooms on the first floor via +4+28 steps.

Boats can be hired from the landing stage in the Petite Venise (Little Venice), on the nearest end of the Grand Canal to the palace. You have a choice of rowing boats which are boarded via -2-1 steps without handrails, or a trip by motor boat via -2+1+2+1. with handrails onto the boat and then -3 once on the boat.

The Petite Venise area has a snackbar, open grass areas and wheelchair toilets (D72 ST76).

The Disney complex

The complex consists of a massive theme park, comprising Disneyland Paris, the Disney Studios, several hotels, and the Disney Village. The area is generally flat, but there is little or no internal transport, apart from to and from the hotels. You will have to cope with long distances, and, probably, with large crowds of people in the theme parks. It is located some 32km east of Paris, and is enclosed within a circle which has a diameter of about 3km. Just outside the circle is Golf Disneyland and the Davy Crocket Adventure camp site.

Disneyland Paris

BP 105, Marne la Vallée, 77777

website: www.disneylandparis.com

The official website includes information on all the facilities, including the two parks, the village and the hotels. It is largely about creating the right image and raising expectations (as one might expect), and the amount of hard information is limited.

A useful website is: <http://homepages.which.net/~ian/> which includes many practical tips and explanations, and there are more helpful tips on: www.france4families.com/Paris/RegionsParisAttractionsEurodisney.htm
A site with some specific information for disabled guests, including some details about the adapted rooms in the Disney hotels is:

http://www.dlp.info/HintsInfos/Disabled_P.htm/Themepark

The main park, **Disneyland Paris**, opened in 1992 under the name Eurodisney, and a new section was added ten years later, themed around the **Walt Disney Studios**. As well as the two parks with all of their rides and attractions, the site also has six hotels, a Davy Crockett Campsite, a lake, and a golf course. Outside the main entrance is the Disney Village where there are restaurants and shops, and entertainments which are open even after the two parks have closed. The area covered by the hotels is huge, and each has its own theme.

We made three visits during 2005, 2006 and 2007 but have had problems in getting and clarifying information about certain important details. The site is too large for us to have been able to check absolutely everything in person. The difficulties in getting our questions answered seemed to be associated with the fact that there is a large and fragmented bureaucracy running things. Changes in the staff providing information about special needs meant that there has been little continuity. In particular, it seemed that the *Guide for Guests with Disabilities* was under revision (for a period that lasted more than a year) and some of our contacts seemed reluctant to say anything or to supply information 'for legal reasons'. Not helpful from our point of view!

We came across some extremely helpful people, but generally only when they were pressed with specific questions and we showed that we weren't letting go until we got a satisfactory answer. Those in the call centre are probably briefed to 'sell the dream' in a way that doesn't really fit with the provision of practical and accurate information.

It's quite expensive to get in, so if you do go, make the most of it.

You aren't allowed to take picnics in, although there's a picnic area just outside the main Park entrance. That's quite a hassle in terms of the distances involved, unless you're very good at planning, so you'll probably be dependent on buying relatively expensive food inside as well. The website has pages in English, and if you search the *useful info/site map* pages you will find some information and advice for disabled visitors, but this is in our view, fairly bland and unspecific. You can download a general *e-brochure*, but you cannot download a scaled plan/map of the sites - which would be really useful when planning a visit, so we have included a crude map/diagram of the main park here. There's a better map in the Michelin Green Guide.

The complex can easily provide enough variety and entertainment for a mini-holiday on its own, certainly for two or three days. **It is smaller**

than its American counterparts but the main Disneyland park is more than 700m in one direction and 800m in the other. The dodgy diagrammatic nature of some of the maps available makes it difficult to estimate distances - but you'll certainly have to walk or wheel quite a long way! The Studios are a little smaller, but with distances of more than 500-600m from the entrance.

Various entertainments are scheduled in different places throughout the day and night, and it's worth doing a little planning, as well as being prepared to pace yourself. There's sometimes a fireworks display *Fantasia in the Sky* and/or the *Main Street Electrical Parade*.

The hotels and campground offer various two or three-day "all-inclusive" holidays. A number of organisations and agencies sell packages, and you can book them directly through Disney. Prices vary according to the time of year.

Dealing with the crowds

The Disney complex includes some very popular sites, and as a result, at most times of the day there will be thousands of visitors, often resulting in long queues, crowded walkways, busy restaurants and competition for meeting the Disney characters. We had to queue for half an hour just to ask a question at the Guest Relations desk at the entrance.

One tip for reducing the impact of the crowds is to get there early!

Disney's provisions for disabled guests

There is/was an informative *Guide for Guests with Disabilities* which covers both the main park and the studios. This is a useful resource and is intended to complement the smaller maps, readily available throughout the park, which provide up to date and detailed information on current events, shows and restaurant facilities. The *Guide* is an A4 booklet.

Using symbols it shows:

- what rides are suitable for disabled walkers
- whether transfer from a wheelchair is necessary
- rides that are especially recommended for those who are hearing or visually impaired
- rides that may frighten, be a risk to epileptics or be of concern to those with particular health problems.

These assessments are of considerable value to disabled visitors, although

what is somewhat inexplicable is that the maps included have no indication of the scale, and as a result distances are difficult to estimate. Toilet facilities, areas reserved during parades for disabled guests, the wheelchair rental point and information points are marked for both parks. If any aspects of your visit are slightly problematic, it'd be worth getting a copy of the *Guide* before you go, so that you can do a little planning. There is some confusion about whether, in the future, copies will be available by post. If you press hard enough, they'll probably send you one.

We were told in 2007 that this *Guide* was being updated, although the process seems to have taken the best part of a year, and was still not completed when we went to press early in 2008. Hopefully by the time you want to go, the new edition will be available.

A copy can be requested by phoning: 0870 606 6800 (UK); 01605 8383 (Ireland) or 00 33 1 60 30 60 81 (USA). It may also be made available on-line. If necessary, get them to e-mail you the URL.

Basic information is available on:

www.disneylandparis.com/uk/good_to_know/special_requirements/disabled_visitors.htm

which we reached via the *homepages.which.net* route (see above).

There are two separate and quite different policies operating in the two parks in relation to disabled guests, and it is important to know about them in order to avoid misunderstandings.

As a general point, the staff are all referred to as 'cast members', while visitors are referred to as 'guests'. In our text here we have used the terms staff/cast members and guests/visitors interchangeably.

An important point to note is that cast members are not allowed to help visitors physically in any way. This seems to be because of a reluctance to take any kind of risk, and of issues to do with insurance policies that have come from across the Atlantic. It runs totally counter to much of what Access Project/PHSP has worked for during the past forty years.

For a refreshing contrast, see the write-up on Parc Asterix.

Disabled visitors to the Disneyland Main Park are allowed go straight to the front of queues. To take advantage of this you will need to go to *City Hall* (immediately to the left of Town Square when you enter the park) or *Guest Relations* (on the right as you come from the reserved car parking and round the corner to the right of the main ticket offices).

There you can make your disability known and obtain the 'blue form' for disabled guests. This procedure is used to prevent the abuse of the preferential queuing arrangement and the blue form is a passport allowing someone to bypass the queues and in some cases to use a special entrance for disabled guests. You can be accompanied on a ride by up to three friends, or all immediate family members (father, mother, and your brothers and sisters). If your disability is not immediately apparent you may need some kind of official documentation to prove it. Even guests in wheelchairs are advised to carry proof of disability (such as a copy of their Blue Badge for parking), but are less likely to have problems getting a blue form than some other disabled visitors. Disabled walkers might well consider using a chair for part of the time, as you'll be there for a long time, and distances can be considerable.

As commented on elsewhere in the guide, French citizens carry an Orange Identity Card which provides appropriate evidence and a crude assessment of someone's degree of disability, hence the insistence on 'proof'.

All the parades and shows have designated areas where disabled visitors (principally chair users) have priority, hence the importance of getting the 'blue form'. We're not quite sure how sensitively disabled walkers (without an orange identity card) are treated. Our observation has been that at parade times the staff are sticklers for keeping to the rules, and they don't generally pander to able-bodied people trying to get a better view by sneaking around the disabled visitors area, so if you need a 'blue form', make sure that you get one first.

In order to meet the famous characters, you may need to ask other cast members. One tip is to find out where the characters go off to for their breaks as they will then re-emerge through the same door. If you talk to the staff, and particularly those with radio communication headsets, they may be able to tell you when a character is likely to reappear, and where from. Once you find out where the characters go off to you may have to be patient before they (or others) reappear, but you should be able to meet them more easily.

The problem for disabled visitors is that there can be a real scrum when the characters are spotted, and some guests can become quite aggressive to ensure that 'their' children get to the front. If you are lurking near the door where they come out from, you've a much better chance of an easy encounter.

Chair users have to transfer on to a seat on a number of the rides in the **Main** park.

One issue of significance in the **Main** park is that chair users are no longer allowed to use the train in order to shorten the distances they need to wheel unless they can transfer via +2 steps on to a seat. According to the rules, the chair needs to be folded. Previously, if their friends could get the chair up and down the steps, people were allowed to travel in their chair, as there is plenty of room.

We have repeatedly asked Disney to confirm this policy, and/or to explain the reasons for the change, but have not received any satisfactory reply.

The policy for disabled guests in the **Studios** park is quite different, because of Disney's newly formulated policy of total integration. Built fairly recently the park has been designed with disabled guests in mind and nearly all the attractions are readily accessible to a wheelchair user. As a result there are no general policies of positive discrimination, and this applies to queuing. All queue lines are wheelchair accessible and disabled guests must take the same route as everyone else.

If you can't stand in a queue for a long time you can collect a special assistance pass (a green card), much like the blue one in the main park. This allows you to wait outside the queue whilst the rest of your group queue as normal, and you rejoin them just before the ride.

Green cards are available from Studio Services on the right of the plaza after the entrance.

Since we first visited in 1993, Disney has made substantial efforts to improve accessibility. Currently, the management claim that with a confident friend/carer, who can facilitate transfers the studios park is 100% 'accessible' to disabled guests and the main park to be over 90%. We think that this assessment applies to fairly able and active chair users. There is probably a little 'public relations exaggeration' in such a statement, as everyone is likely to find some things difficult and not all the rides or activities are suitable for everyone.

Disabled guests should be able to have a lot of fun in the parks, and our survey teams certainly enjoyed themselves.

Getting to Disney

If you are coming by car from the centre of Paris leave by Porte de Bercy and continue along the A4 in the direction of Metz/Strasbourg. Camp Davy Crockett is off exit 13 while the complex is off exit 14. Payment for parking is made at toll gates when you enter the complex. When you pay you should say that you want to use the disabled persons' CP and request the access code. Follow the wheelchair signs after the toll gate to the CP assigned for persons with disabilities. The barriers are on your right. The CP is located about 100m from the ticket offices for Disneyland Paris, next to the Disneyland Hotel, but some 600m from the Studios. It is considerably closer than the main car and coach parks.

Chessy station is at the end of line A4 of the RER. The platforms are accessible (via lifts) without steps, as are the Eurostar platforms further over. For details of how to use the RER and of which stations in the centre are accessible (and of the challenges in terms of getting on and off the trains) see the chapter on *Getting around*.

Buying Tickets

The Studios are about 500m from the main park and 600m from the special CP, bearing diagonally right when facing away from the park's main entrance. The ticket office is on the right at the Walk Disney Studio entrance and cubicle 2 has a lowered ticket window. This was, however, closed when we visited.

Fastpass

As well as knowing about the queuing policies you should take note of the Fastpass scheme, which is of benefit to all visitors. To disabled visitors in the main park with a 'blue form' it is of limited use, as they are able to bypass queues anyway, but in the Studios park it is able to considerably cut down waiting times. For those rides with Fastpass, the procedure is to go to the Fastpass terminals at the ride, enter your ticket and receive a time at which you should return later. On returning you will be directed into the Fastpass queue of the ride and queue for a considerably shorter period of time, probably some 10-15mins, compared to a possible couple of hours.

Baby switch

If you're a family with a very young child, then parents and other siblings can each 'have a go' on various rides without having to queue up twice. For some family groups this can be a very useful facility.

Inside the Disneyland Main Park

The first area you will come to on entering the park is called Town Square. Most importantly, here you can pick up your blue form from the Town Hall. However, there is also a wheelchair and stroller hire shop, located to the right of the main entrance and well signed. Wheelchairs and pushchairs/strollers may be hired for €6.50 a day with a €150 deposit.

Wheelchair toilets are available throughout the park; they are most numerous in Main Street and there is one in each of the other five areas. They are all marked on the 'Guide for Guests with Disabilities' and had dimensions of at least **D85 ST120**, although the seat height seem to vary quite a bit, as it does with other toilets in Paris.

The ride specific information for Adventureland, Discoveryland, Fantasyland and Frontierland will hopefully be included in the new *Guide for Guests with Disabilities*, and we won't comment further.

Various entertainments are scheduled in different places throughout the day and night, so sort out when and where they are, be prepared to pace yourself and do a little planning.

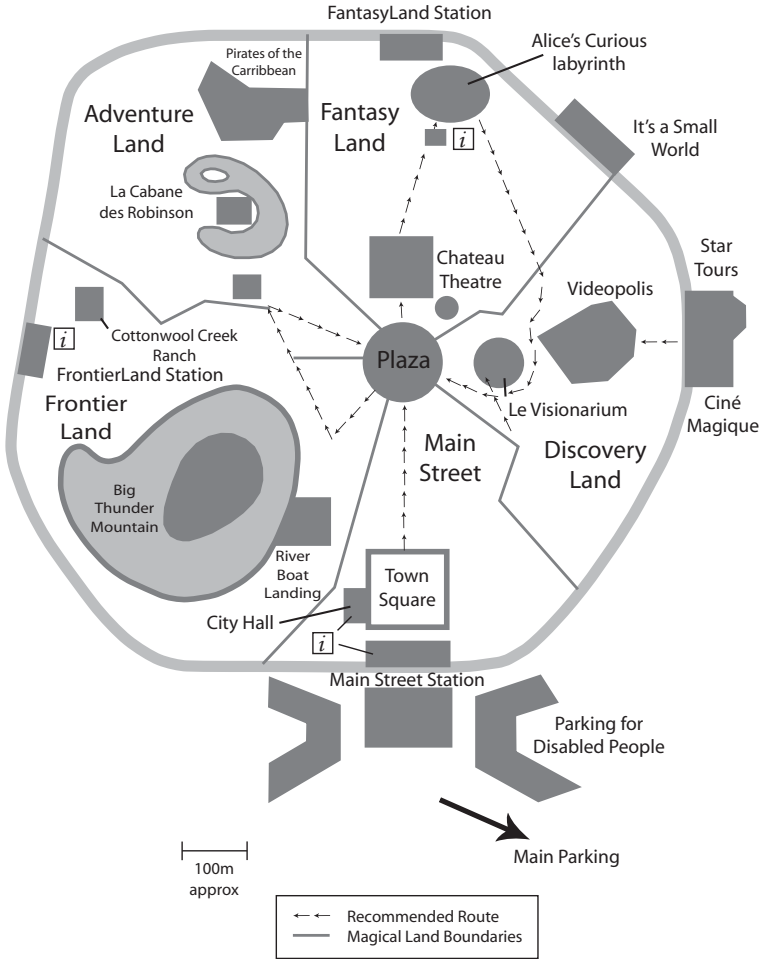
There's sometimes a fireworks display *Fantasia in the Sky* and the *Main Street Electrical Parade* in the evenings.

There has obviously been much thought put into the design of the park and it is a shame that some internal transport could not be designed to accommodate chair users without having to transfer. In particular, the lack of portable ramps at the three stations to help get from the platform into the carriage is a serious omission.

It is advisable for a chair user to bring along a couple of friends to help where necessary.

Disneyland Paris

A possible route/tour



A visit minimising the distance you go could take you down Main Street to the Central Plaza. This is about 300m. A detour into Frontierland would take you some 200m and back, if you want to get close to Big Thunder Mountain. You may also want to get a glimpse of Adventureland, and if you add in the bits nearest to the Central Plaza, it might add a further 300 to 400m to your trip. Going on into Fantasyland

it is only another 300m to the station at the far end. You could then make your way back through Discoveryland, probably taking you some 700m via Videopolis or Cinémagique. This will take you a total of around 2km, possibly a fraction more. Over a whole day that is not a huge distance, and taking suitable breaks for eating and just sitting and watching could make it relatively easy. Going on various rides will use up some of your energy.

For disabled walkers, and those who can get up the two steps into the train, it can be very useful in reducing the distances you need to walk or wheel. Coming from the main entrance and entering the arches underneath Main Street station, there is flat access to the platform via a lift (D115 W135 L125) on your right in the second alcove. The train stops at Fantasyland, Frontierland and Discoveryland. There are +2 steps to the coaches, through a gap of 70cm in the side of the carriage. The sides of the train are open, so going on board is possible for some chair users (although apparently against the rules). There is no ramp available. At the other three stations there is at least one step-free route to and from the platform.

Inside the Studios

Opened in 2002, the studio park offers a range of attractions and rides based loosely around the silver screen. All attractions and facilities are designed to be accessible by wheelchair users while still in their chairs, except the rock and rollercoaster and the simulator within the TV studios, for which one must transfer.

In the far right hand corner of the plaza wheelchairs there are wheelchairs for hire. **Wheelchair toilets (all matching D85 ST75 SH50)** can be found in the plaza, Studio 1, Rendezvous café, inside Moteurs Action and behind the Art of Disney Animation building.

As in the main park there is also a wheelchair and stroller/baby buggy hire shop, located to the right of the main entrance and well signed. Wheelchairs and pushchairs may be hired for €6.50 a day with a €150 deposit.

There are eleven attractions within the park, most of which are shows (all with allocated wheelchair spaces) or walk through attractions posing no

problem to disabled guests. 10% of the *Walt Disney Television Studios* attraction is accessed by an open stair lift and you need to transfer into a seat to use the roller coaster simulator. The *Flying Carpets over Agrabah* ride has a wheelchair accessible 'carpet', which is accessed up an electric ramp and staff have full knowledge of how to adapt. Disabled guests should enter through the exit. The *Rock 'n' Roller Coaster starring Aerosmith* is accessed step-free in the normal queue and via a lift (D80) through the fastpass entrance. Transfer is necessary and there is one accessible carriage with a small door on the side to help, though the step down is still 40cm. One wheelchair user is allowed per four trains due to evacuation procedures, but the trains arrive in quick succession. Your wheelchair will be brought around to the disembarkation point by a member of staff. The *Studio Tram Tour* is accessible step-free via a manual ramp in the front carriage. Two wheelchair spaces are available per train and staff will provide restraints so that your chair can't slide around.

Parc Astérix

Parc Astérix

BP 8, Plailly, 60128

Tel: 08 92 68 30 10 or (03) 4462 3404/3030

website: www.parcasterix.fr e-mail: messages@asterix.tm.fr

Parc Astérix is about 40km northeast of Paris and is most easily reached by car. Take the A1 out of Paris and turn off at the prominent signpost to Parc Astérix. There is only one entrance. Car parks 1 and 2 have 16 BB spaces each.

If you don't have a car you can take the RER line B to Roissy Charles de Gaulle, which has large lifts. The courtesy bus which runs every half an hour from the station to the park has 3 large steps.

The park is vast and covers some 20ha. Visiting most of the attractions would involve a walk/wheel of about 3 km. It is mostly flat and paths are tarmac, apart from the area around attractions 43 to 45 which is up a hill in a wooded area and where the paths are unsurfaced and somewhat rough. This hilly bit contains mainly children's playground areas. The rides are similar to those in fairgrounds, although far larger in size. The park's policy is to let a wheelchair users go on any ride, provided they are able to transfer and are accompanied. The staff we encountered on our visit were more than happy to assist. You obviously need to make

your own mind up about which rides may be sensible to tackle. If you have a spinal weakness, then the rollercoaster is probably not for you, and similarly if you don't like flashing lights and loud noises, then don't go on the ghost train!

Like its counterpart Disneyland Paris, this amusement park is based on famous cartoon characters, but in this case, French ones. Asterix is a brave little Gaul who, with his roly-poly friend Obelix, always seems to get his way, whatever the odds.

Sampling Asterix's Gallic charm is considerably less expensive than visiting his American counterpart. Parc Astérix has a combination of rides, attractions, shops, food kiosks and a great deal of cartoon memorabilia. Knowledge of the books by Goscinny and Uderzo is not vital to having a good time, although a general idea of the stories help clarify what various things are about.

The Park is dedicated entirely to humour, derision, and impertinence...

The TransDémonium will take you into the forgotten areas of the Medieval City where spirits and witches terrorise the human beings there.

You can confront Zeus and his impressive mountain on a roller coaster, or Goudurix who will turn you upside down 7 times, plunging into the heart of prehistory looking for Hourra, etc etc

..... *so are you ready for the some exciting adventures?*

In addition to the rides, the park has many other attractions. There are various shows on at different times of the day, and there are several accessible eating places with movable tables and chairs.

There are **wheelchair cubicles** in both the mens and womens toilets **at eight locations** in the park, all of which are marked on the map. **All the cubicles have D70+ and ST70+.**

The numbers used here correspond to those on the official map, and are also on the website. All we are describing is the basic access barriers before you reach the ride. What you need to do is to take a good look yourself, and decide on its practicality for you

Attractions:

- 1** **Les Stars de l'Empire.** Roman Arena. Step-free access.
- 2** **La Bataille d'Alésia.** Target Shooting. Squirts water! Counter height 80cm. Step-free entrance.

- 3 **Le Carrousel de César.** Merry-Go-Round. Step-free to platform, +1 [40 cm] step to the carrousel, step-free to carriages or +1 to horses.
- 4 **La Descente du Styx.** If you go in via the exit gate there are then only -10 steps to the moving platform. This is the recommended route for disabled visitors as using the main entrance involves -20.
- 5 **La Flottille de Néon.** Radio-controlled boats. Entrance +5 steps.
- 6 **Les Espions de César.** Monorail. At least +25 steps to get there.
- 7 **Le Petit Train.** Train ride for children only. Step-free access via exit (W70) bypasses W56 at entrance. Narrow benches to sit on.
- 8 **Les Arcades de Pompéi.** Video games. +1 step.
- 9 **Le Théâtre de Poséidon.** Dolphin show. Five wheelchair spaces have step-free access. The four rows directly in front of these spaces have spaces reserved for transfer, but there are -2 steps per row.
- 10 **Le Cheval de Trois.** Step-free entry via exit. +3 to the platform.
- 11 **Le Vol d'Icare.** Step-free access through the exit gates, bypassing about 10 steps.
- 12 **L'Hydre de Leme.** Step-free to platform. Entrance to the cars via +1 step [40 cm] and is very narrow (W30).
- 13 **La Rivière d'Elis.** Step-free entry. +1 [20cm] for transfer into the boat.
- 14 **Le Tonnerre de Zeus.** Europe's biggest wooden rollercoaster. Step-free entry via exit, bypassing about 10 steps.
- 15 **Théâtre de Panoramix.** Three shows held every day. Step-free access via unmarked door on the left just before the entrance.
- 16 **La GalPre.** Big swinging boat. Step-free entrance via the exit. Transfer width 40cm.
- 17 **L'Escadrille des As.** Children's merry-go-round with aeroplanes. Step-free access. but you'll need help to get into a 'plane.
- 18 **Le Mini Carrousel.** Step-free entrance. +1 [40cm] step before transfer. Children only.
- 19 **Les Petites Chaise Volantes.** Step-free to platform. Swing-style chairs hung on chains. Seats are 60cm off ground. Children only.
- 20 **Les Petits Drakkars.** Circular boat ride. Step-free access to platform.
- 21 **Goudurix.** Step-free access via steep ramp at exit. Two chair users were on the ride when we surveyed.

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- 22 **Le Transdemonium.** Ghost train. Step-free access via exit.
- 23 **Place du Moyen Âge.** Town square where you may meet the characters from the Asterix cartoons. Step-free.
- 24 **Les Artisans dans la rue de Paris.** Artisans' workshops in the town square. Step-free.
- 25 **Les Mousquetaires.** The show takes place on a raised stage which can be viewed from the town square.
- 26 **Les Chevaux de Roy.** +1 [25cm] step to carousel, then transfer into a carriage (2x15cm steps) or onto a horse. +12 to an upper level.
- 27 **Automates.** Automated marionette show inside fort-type area. Step-free (no seats)
- 28 **Paris je t'aime.** Projected film in the same area as the show above. Step-free (no seats)
- 29 **Main basse sur La Joconde.** Comedy/stunt show. Step-free.
- 30 **L'Oxygénarium.** Water rapids ride. Step-free access but chair users and others will need to transfer across a substantial gap. Have a look first!
- 31 **Les Chaise Volantes.** Step-free to ride, which involves swing-type chairs which rotate and fly outwards.
- 32 **Maquillage pour enfants.** Children's face-painting activities (some days only). Step-free access.
- 33 **Machine Infernale.** Step-free access.
- 34 **Nationale 7.** Old fashioned car ride. Step-free to platform, +2 [35cm; 20cm] steps into car.
- 35 **Les Jeux des Rigoline.** Games stands. Step-free but the counters are high for chair users. Step-free entry via exit. Narrow +1 [30 cm] step to transfer to the boat.
- 36 **Les Chaudrons.** Spinning teacup/cauldron ride. Step-free to platform, +1 [20cm] step to cars
- 37 **Périeférix.** Rollercoaster with two-person cars. Step-free entry via exit. +1 [15cm] transfer.
- 38 **La Petite Tempête.** Step-free to platforms. +2 [30cm; 25cm] steps for transfer to boats.
- 39 **La Trace du Hourra.** Bobsled type ride. No access obstacles, apart from needing to transfer into individual cars.
- 40 **Les Petits Capitaines.** Radio controlled boats. Step-free.
- 41 **Menhir Express.** Log flume ride. Step-free entry via exit, then transfer into log-shaped boats.

- 42 **Les Petits Chars Tamponneurs.** Children's dodgem car ride. No access obstacles, apart from needing to transfer into cars.
- 43 **La Forêt des Druides.** Children's playground area, which is up a steep cobbled hill.
- 44 **L'Ecole des Druides.** A further play area up the same steep cobbled hill.
- 45 **La Ronde des Rodins.** A loop the loop ride in the druid's forest area.
- 46 **Epidermaïs Croisières.** Boat cruise. +11 steps to moving platform, then a 60cm horizontal transfer into to boats.
- 47 **Le Théâtre du Barde.** A further show area: no significant access obstacles.
- 48 **Le Grand Splatch.** Water ride. Step-free entry via exit. 60cm horizontal transfer.
- 51 **Les Jeux d'Olympie.** Video games.

Fontainebleau

For local information, have a look at www.uk.fontainebleau-tourisme.com (for the Fontainebleau tourism office) or at conventional guidebooks. There's an excellent map of the town on the tourism office website, which also gives you a direct link to the Chateau site.

Tourism office

4, rue Royale, Fontainebleau 77300

Tel: 01 60 74 99 99 Fax: 01 60 74 80 22

e-mail: info@fontainebleau-tourisme.com

To get there by car, take the A6 out of Paris to the Fontainebleau exit and follow signs along the N7 to the town centre and Château. By train, go from Gare de Lyon to Fontainebleau-Avon and then take a taxi. The local buses are unadapted.

Château de Fontainebleau

Fontainebleau, 77300

Tel: 01 60 71 50 70 Fax: 01 60 71 50 71

websites: www.musee-chateau-fontainebleau.fr or

www.chateaufontainebleau.net

e-mail: contact.chateau-de-fontainebleau@culture.fr

Closed Tuesdays

This large and impressive palace is situated some 60km south of Paris.

It is one of France's major attractions. It was used from the 12thC as a hunting lodge for various aristocrats and royalty. A palace was built and developed from the 16thC onwards as successive French kings wanted an impressive setting in which to display their numerous art treasures. The grand horse-shoe staircase, provided a dramatic setting for royal events. Notably, it was the setting for the departure of Napoleon I, where he made a memorable farewell speech before going into exile.

The town which has grown up around the chateau is surrounded by a magnificent forest which provides some attractive drives and picnic spots.

There is a small CP situated directly in front of the main courtyard, with two BB spaces, one on either side of the main gate. There's more parking in nearby streets. From the main gates it is some 100m to the information desk in the corner of the courtyard, over cobbled stones which one can only describe as being exceptionally vicious and bumpy. The information counter and a model of the Château (which can be seen from a chair users eyeline) are reached via -3 steps (with handrail).

It is possible to get permission to take a vehicle with disabled passengers into the cobbled courtyard, and drop them off by the main visitor entrance. The vehicle entrance to the chateau is halfway down the left side of the courtyard. Go down rue Denecourt, and on your right there's an archway where you can turn into the staff CP where there is a security guard in the corner on your right. If you ask it should be possible to take your vehicle into the courtyard and drop off any passengers by the main visitor entrance on the opposite side. A disabled driver may be able to sweet-talk the staff into letting the car stay in the courtyard during a visit.

Half way down the right-hand side of the first courtyard is the main visitor entrance to the building, which has +1 step, bypassed by a portable ramp. Two wheelchairs for use inside the Château can be borrowed and cloakroom facilities, along with the audio guides are found at the end of the first corridor via -3 which are bypassed by a steepish ramp with no handrail. Be sure to get tickets for entrance into the right parts of the Palace (some areas of which may only be open at certain times) and if you would like an audioguide, then pay for it here.

The vast majority of the exhibits are on the first floor, which is reached by a single lift (D75 W125 L145). This is located off the

corridor leading from the ticket office to the audioguides desk, just before you reach the –3 steps. Once upstairs, access is step-free to the Grand Apartments and Napoleon I Museum, except for –2 bypassed by a portable ramp into the Francois I gallery. Note that around the 500m route there are some narrowish passages (68cm being the narrowest). There are a number of horizontal displays H90 which might be slightly difficult to see from a chair-users eyeline.

The adapted toilet (D68 ST90 SH52, inward opening door and a little tight for turning space) is situated on the GF in a staff area. After you have bought your tickets, you need to go down the corridor, down the (ramped) –3 steps to where the audioguides are being handed out. The toilet is off the corridor to your left, and will be opened for you on request by the helpful staff.

Access in the vast gardens is a mixture of 20% cobbled and 80% hard grit paths. Diana's Garden to the left of the Château plays host to the world-famous urinating dogs and spewing deer fountain. The rest of the gardens behind the main, White Horse Courtyard, can be reached avoiding the cobbles by parking at an alternative CP in the place de Boishyver. Access to the sunken Grand Parterre Garden is via –5, which can be bypassed by ramps at each corner. Also of interest are the carp pond and the jardin anglaise, which are both step-free.

There are no facilities for eating at the Château, so you might well want to take a picnic with you if you're planning to stay for a while although there are a good number of restaurants/cafés around. Some are in rue Denecourt, and there's Le Magenta just opposite the main entrance at the end of blvd Magenta.

