



Picture Perfect

Some of France's most amazing sights are best explored on foot as **DAVID POTTS** discovers on his nine-day walking holiday.

It's one of the most photographed bridges in the world. No, it's not London's Tower Bridge nor is it San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge or even the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It's a much more modest bridge – little more than the length and breadth of a cricket pitch. It is, of course, the famous Japanese bridge in painter Claude Monet's garden at Giverny, 80km west of Paris, France.

Here in this garden, with its signature bridge, Monet nurtured his renowned skills in painting nature, water and light and the vibrant colours of a garden in different seasons. "Apart from painting and gardening, I'm not good at anything," said Monet. But wait, before you even go to Giverny you must visit the Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris, at the other end of the Tuileries gardens from the Louvre.

Here you will see the famous Les Nymphéas, the Water Lilies, eight giant panels inspired by the water lilies in Monet's Giverny Japanese garden. The artist gave the paintings to France to celebrate victory in the great war (WW1). It took Monet 12 years to paint the masterpieces which were hung in 1927, a year after his death.

So, now to Giverny and the inspiration for Monet's wonderful impressionistic paintings which have had such a powerful effect on 20th century art. Each year half a million visitors enjoy the gardens and Monet's house and see first hand the waterlily pond. Giverny is approximately one hour's bus ride from the centre of

Paris. The best way to visit is to take an organised, half day tour. Monet was the best-known of a colony of painters who lived in the village of Giverny at the turn of the 20th century. The village inspired countless other artworks but Monet's garden art is best known. After Monet's death the house and gardens were neglected and not much was left after World War II bombings – floors and ceiling beams had rotted away, a staircase had collapsed and trees were even growing in the big studio. Monet's son Michel finally willed the house to France. It took nearly 10 years to restore the house and gardens, but the property was finally opened to the public in 1980.

As we walk around the edge of the one hectare house garden with its autumn and sunflowers and geraniums dominating in a garden showing the last flames of summer colour. We glean a true appreciation of what this was like at the turn of the century. We can't even see over the top of giant sunflowers that grow profusely here and white crocuses are starting to emerge in lawns and in window boxes below green shutters, while red geraniums provide more colour. The house is furnished with some of the prints Monet collected, including his Japanese prints and copies of the furniture which was in the house in Monet's day.

Monet had the water lily pond dug and a branch of the Epte River diverted to course through it. The water garden was inspired by Japanese gardens Monet knew from prints he collected avidly. Local

craftsmen built the central Japanese bridge and later added a frame to carry wisterias which, in bloom, hang in purple showers. In addition to the bridge, other smaller bridges, weeping willows and a bamboo forest surround the pond.

A path circles the pond on which sits the rowboat also feature in Monet's paintings. The pond is all stillness and reflections and colour. Studying it now is like looking at a real Monet painting. He was influenced by clouds that passed overhead, the heavy showers, the wind which blew suddenly and the light which faded and reappeared.

The writer travelled courtesy of Adventure World and Cathay Pacific Airlines.

GETTING THERE

There is a daily service to Paris via Hong Kong from the mainland capitals and six times weekly from Cairns. Cityrama has half day tours to Giverny departing daily at 1.45p.m. from Paris from April 1 to October 31 2009 at a cost of 67 Euros for an adult (www.pariscityrama.com). In Paris, Adventure World has accommodation at the Les Jardins d'Eiffel from \$141 per person per night, twin share.