

BY THE WAY

8 less-crowded places to appreciate art, history and nature

Even in busy cities like Paris and Rome, you can go where the tourists aren't



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CORRECTION

A previous version of this article incorrectly said the gallery Le Stanze del Vetro was located in the Castello neighborhood of Venice. It is on a nearby island, San Giorgio. It also incorrectly said how many items the Carnavalet houses. It has more than 600,000, not nearly 10,000. This article has been corrected.

On a sunny July morning in [New York City](#), the line for the American Museum of Natural History flowed out the front door, down the steps and around the block. Once inside, visitors were packed elbow-to-elbow, stroller-to-stroller, all jostling to get a glimpse of the Hall of North American Mammals.

It would not be worth it. I know this because I was in this crowd. I made the same mistake at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Van Gogh's cypresses aren't as majestic when you're only able to see them through the cellphone screens of other visitors.

As summer travel swells, concentrated crowds are making the most popular attractions miserable places to be. There is a [time and place for tourist traps](#), but vacation time is too precious to be stewing in massive lines.

If you must see the Louvre, go knowing what you're getting yourself into. But if you're flexible, you can have a more relaxed time on a trip by choosing these quieter alternatives to major landmarks.

Skip the Pantheon for the Basilica of Sant'Agostino in Rome

Rome-based cookbook author and tour guide [Katie Parla](#) says this is not the summer to wing it in Italy, where the weather is hot and the crowds are huge. “The kind of tourism that I enjoy — like fly by the seat of your pants, don’t have any plans — it’s really challenging to do that in the big cities now,” she said. “There is no moment where the crowds are smaller and you can get in.”

Parla says it has been a “nightmare” trying to get travelers into ticketed sites such as the Colosseum. “Big tour companies buy up all the tickets,” she said.

Earlier this month, the Italian Culture Ministry introduced a 5 euro ticket to enter the [Pantheon](#), which has led to [long lines and confusion](#). While the ancient Roman temple is a can’t-miss for its architecture, paintings and notable burials, there’s plenty of art and history to peruse in lesser-known places.

“Rome has so much artwork in small churches,” Parla said. “You can see works by Raphael and Caravaggio and Michelangelo with shockingly few crowds.” One such church is the [Basilica of Sant'Agostino](#). Though you won’t be able to visit Raphael’s final resting place (he’s buried at the Pantheon), you can see some of his work along with a painting by Caravaggio for free.

Skip Kyoto’s Fushimi Inari Shrine for Ise Grand Shrine

Since [Japan](#) reopened for travel last fall, the country’s most popular sites, such as Tokyo Skytree and Kyoto’s Arashiyama Bamboo Forest, have been [swarmed with tourists](#). One particularly clogged social media magnet is Kyoto’s [Fushimi Inari Shrine](#); after a recent visit, travel writer Jake Emen described it as “swamped.”

To appreciate stunning temples away from the masses, Naomi Mano, who runs the Tokyo-based travel company [Luxurique](#), recommends nearby [Nara](#), home to some of the country’s oldest shrines. [Kasuga Grand Shrine](#) is similarly colored to Kyoto’s Fushimi Inari Shrine’s famous vibrant [torii gates](#).

And because Nara is older than Kyoto, and also one of Japan’s former capital cities, “it’s just got a lot more history to it,” Mano said.

If you’re feeling ambitious, Mano’s more off-the-beaten-path option is the [Ise Grand Shrine](#), a holy site established about 2,000 years ago. After appreciating the temples and surrounding forest, travelers and pilgrims are welcome to cleanse and purify themselves at the sacred Isuzugawa River.

“It’s the top of all the shrines in all of Japan,” Mano said. “It’s where the emperor goes every year. It’s a beautiful, very surreal destination.”

Skip Edinburgh Castle for the Palace of Holyroodhouse

A trip to Scotland's capital may feel incomplete without a trip to [Edinburgh Castle](#), one of the oldest forts in Europe. That may be why it's one of the [most crowded sites](#) on the continent. Your best bet is to visit [during off-peak hours](#), or skip it for another royal site.

Duncan Greenfield-Turk, managing director and chief travel designer for Global Travel Moments, recommends visiting [Holyroodhouse](#), the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland. You can see the former chambers of Mary, Queen of Scots, and some of the most important jewels in the Royal Collection with far fewer crowds than Edinburgh Castle.

Skip the Louvre in Paris for the Musée Carnavalet

Even with its timed ticketing system, the Louvre can feel like a zoo. For an alternative that's also an architectural and historic treasure, [Kathleen Peddicord](#), who splits her time between Paris and Panama, recommends the [Musée Carnavalet](#), a museum dedicated to the history of Paris.

The Carnavalet is made up of two mansions in the Marais district: the Hôtel Carnavalet and the former Hôtel Le Peletier de Saint Fargeau. It houses more than 600,000 archaeological items, historic objects, photography and paintings that depict life in Paris. You'll find work from artists on display at the Louvre, such as 19th-century painter Louis Béroud, and items believed to be owned by [Marie Antoinette](#), Napoleon and Marcel Proust.

It's not just what's on display that's interesting; "it's also the rooms themselves that are worth seeing," Peddicord said in an email. And don't miss the gardens.

Skip Glacier National Park for Bob Marshall Wilderness

Visiting America's most popular national parks this summer can be a challenge. Several [require advance reservations](#) to reduce crowds, including parts of [Glacier National Park](#). Instead of fighting for a slot, Scott Cundy, co-founder of [Wildland Trekking](#) tour company, recommends visiting the nearby [Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex](#) in western Montana, just south of Glacier.

Visitors to Bob Marshall don't need a reservation or permit to explore more than 1 million acres of mountains, lakes and waterfalls.

Beyond Montana, Cundy suggests [North Cascades National Park](#) in Washington as an alternative to Glacier's wilderness. "It's one of our country's most spectacular and least appreciated national parks, especially for people that are willing to put in some effort and hike," he said. "It's just absolutely gorgeous."

Wherever you end up, Cundy says the key is to start early. And even in very popular destinations, if you put in some effort, you can find some space to yourself. "Go on some long hikes," Cundy said. "It's the first mile, maybe two, that it's crowded. Then after that, it really starts to thin out."

Skip the Acropolis in Athens for the Temple of Poseidon

Between extreme heat and wildfires, it has been a hot and dangerous summer in Greece. Earlier this month, the Acropolis in Athens shut down twice for several hours because of extreme temperatures. The monument's staff went on strike over dangerous conditions.

In addition, visitors face a new e-ticketing system debuting this month to control Acropolis crowds, which often clock in at more than 17,000 visitors a day. Avoid the chaotic scene and go southeast of the capital to Cape Sounion to see the Temple of Poseidon, said Emmanuel Burgio, founder of travel company Blue Parallel.

Dedicated to the god of the sea, the ancient marble temple perched on a cliff's edge is one of the most important historical sites from Athens's Golden Age, Burgio says. If you check out the temple's reviews on Google, visitors report no wait times and no reservations needed.

Skip Yosemite for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

Yosemite, one of America's most popular national parks, has made headlines this summer for unprecedented lines and hours-long waits to enter. Save it for another season and try Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

The stars of the show here are giant sequoia trees, including the largest living sequoia, the General Sherman Tree. Plus, "it has just a fraction of the number of visitors," Cundy says. "It's just beautiful."

Skip St. Mark's Square in Venice for Castello

Between a new "entrance fee" coming in 2024 and its #EnjoyRespectVenezia campaign, Venice is working to fight overtourism.

Parla recommends skipping the crowds at its most famous sites, such as the Piazza San Marco or St. Mark's Square, and heading to the Castello neighborhood. While you're in the area, stop by the Basilica di San Pietro di Castello, whose history dates back to the 7th century. And on San Giorgio, a nearby island opposite San Marco, Parla also loves Le Stanze del Vetro, a gallery that "always has incredible glass exhibitions," she said.

Greenfield-Turk's alternative picks are another square, the Campo Santa Margherita in the Dorsoduro district, and the open-air Rialto market. Both are guaranteed to be bustling with Venice locals.