

Mission Impossible

A mechanical Wonderland



Image taken from conception drawing

He who can copy can do."
Leonardo da Vinci

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A Mechanical Wonderland

If you think taking an exciting break to the continent is a mission impossible, then think again. Book your car onto the channel tunnel train, pack your passport, get your VE 103 from RAC motorability Assist and you are on your way.

Paris might be your first thought but why not consider zany Nantes. From Calais it is only a four hour journey and you will not be disappointed. It has something for everyone, old and young alike and in the Machine de L'île especially disability is no problem.

Once a thriving Atlantic port the city has reinvented itself as a cultural capital with a flavour of craziness and it makes you smile and feel good. It stands on the bank of the river Loire and in the machines de L'île, a 5 minute majestic stroll aboard a giant 23 metre tall mechanical elephant weighing 50 tons brings you to an equally zany 23 meter tall carousel. They are the brain child of two "mad inventors" Francois Delaroziere and Pierre Orefice and reflect the imaginary world of Jules Verne who was born in the city and the mechanical universe of Leonardo de Vinci.



The giant mechanical heron

A giant mechanical heron takes flight above our heads with panniers suspended below it and if it were not for the roof in the tall warehouse you get the feeling that it would have broken free and those who rode on board would have

soared beyond the clouds like one of the bareback riders in Dinatopia. Strange shaped steel and leather chairs face into the gallery and carry others up the walls on long poles as those sitting in them push on knobs and pull on riveted

handles. All manner of plans and detailed drawings festoon the walls and all around other giant mechanical bugs demand attention. In deed if this was not the twenty first century you would think you were in the workshop of Leonardo de Vinci.

Actually this is the zany gallery in Nantes machine de L'île were a group of talented and passionate devotees under the guidance of two mad inventors Francois Delaroziere and Pierre Orefice work on a project that when complete will be mind boggling. They are creating a heron tree made from steel and when finished it will stand over 35 metres tall. Within it will be walkways, platforms and all manner of surprises including many of the mechanical creatures which stare at you from every corner. It will unite the mechanical world with the natural wonders of nature and will be festooned with plants. At the top will be two great platforms from which the mechanical herons will fly. Even now you can walk on one of the prototype branches which soars over the café and you can watch the work as it goes ahead in the workshop.



Pulling on levers and handles bring these bugs to life



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PETROL: Similar cost to the UK

HOTELS: These vary and care needs to be taken in selection to make sure that disabled facilities are available. In Nantes itself many do not have free car parking facilities.

EATING: The choice is endless but many establishments close on Sunday, even hotel restaurants and you may need to book to visit the most popular choices.

MONEY: Expect to pay in Euros. These are easily available and there are many ATM machines including isle da machines

LANGUAGE: The French are reluctant to offer translations in their brochures or commentaries so a phrase book or an app on your phone can prove useful. Most can attempt some English but it is a good idea to read up on Nantes before your visit especially if you wish to fully appreciate all the zany creations.

Words: Janet Myers

Images: Jonathan Myers