

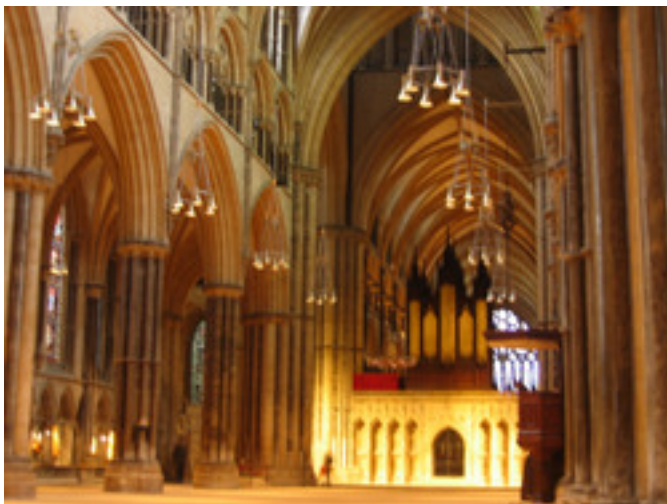
## TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE

# 'DaVinci' movie will mean more travelers on the trail of the grail

By John Blanchette



CHATEAU DE VILLETTE - France's Chateau de Villette found new fame after author Dan Brown decided to incorporate it into "The Da Vinci Code" as the location of Sir Leigh Teabing's residence. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



LINCOLN CATHEDRAL - TravAdv 3B "The Da Vinci Code's" producers refused to pay the exorbitant fees required to film inside Westminster Abbey. Instead, filming was done inside this cathedral in Lincoln, England. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



**ROSSLYN CHAPEL** - Rosslyn Chapel is a 15th century structure where Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou uncover the truth of the holy grail in "The Da Vinci Code." The chapel is exquisitely carved and the artwork is full of biblical, Masonic, pagan and Knights Templar themes. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.



**BURGHLEY HOUSE** - Burghley House, England's largest and grandest house, substituted for the pope's residence and other scenes in the film. Lunch is offered in the restaurant, featuring venison supplied by deer that graze the grounds. CNS Photo by John Blanchette.

EDINBURGH, Scotland - I was one of four people in the country who hadn't read the book when the French, British and Scottish Tourist Offices and Eurostar called regarding the "Da Vinci Code" tour they were organizing. The largest-selling book since the Bible (45 million to date), Dan Brown's novel was being filmed by Ron Howard, with Tom Hanks, Audrey Tautou, Ian McKellen, Jean Reno, Paul Bettany and Alfred Molina in the lead roles. My assignment was to follow in their footsteps, visiting the places where they filmed, staying in many of the same hotels and dining in restaurants where they ate.

I also had to read the book, which proved easier than I thought. It's a real page-turner (454 of them), taking you on a 20-hour journey through three countries. Written almost like a film script, short chapters move from scene to scene with riveting action.

I flew into Paris in early March, not an ideal time to go on the "Da Vinci Code" trail unless you're enamored of freezing weather (it rained or snowed every day). But I was on a quest and the tour did have its compensations. We dined at the Ritz (where the movie opens) and drank 23-euro Opus Dei cocktails created at the hotel's Hemingway Bar. For a mere 670 Euros you can stay one night in room 512, where Hanks is awakened in the first scene.

Needless to say, nearly every tour guide service and key location site is offering some sort of "Da Vinci Code" tour to take advantage of the huge crowds expected over the summer. The two I found most entertaining were the walking tours in Paris ([www.ClassicWalksParis.com](http://www.ClassicWalksParis.com)) and London ([www.Goldentours.com](http://www.Goldentours.com)). Interestingly, the number one item in the lost and found at the Louvre and on Eurostar this year are copies of "The Da Vinci Code."

I wasn't alone on the quest. In Paris the two-hour

tour takes you through the hair-raising night of Harvard professor Robert Langdon (Hanks) and French government cryptologist Sophie Neveu (Tautou). In the Louvre you'll visit the magnificent paintings key to the plot and stand next to I.M. Pei's inverted pyramid, with 666 windowpanes (the devil, you say).

The movie was filmed at night over a three-week period, thanks to permission obtained by French President Jacques Chirac. There was no such luck in London, where Westminster Abbey deemed the film inappropriate after five weeks of deliberation.

A short distance from the Louvre is the Church of Saint-Sulpice, home to the towering Obelisk and the Rose Line. The infamous giant candleholders lie upon the altar. Incidentally, there is no choir loft from which the nun viewed Silas.

We departed Paris for Chateau de Villette. Brown's wife Blythe, who did most of the on-site research for the book, toured the chateau in 2000 and Brown decided to incorporate it into the novel as the location of Sir Leigh Teabing's residence. The film crew of 800 spent five nights shooting at the site. You can spend six days at the chateau (3,900 and 4,300 euros) or just have a lunch or diner tour (150 or 175 euros). You'll see the couch where the keystone was hidden, visit the secret loft in the barn, the garage from which they escaped and the outside study door entered by Silas.

We left Paris via the Eurostar train, approaching speeds of 200 mph as we shot through the Chunnel into London in 2 1/2 hours. The London walking tour started on Fleet Street at the Temple Church. We passed King's College where Langdon and Neveu searched into the meaning of the clue "in London lies a knight a Pope interred," and turned the corner by the Royal Courts of Justice, barely missing Dan Brown, who was there for a plagiarism trial that he eventually won.

Walking around Westminster Abbey we saw the only part of the church that is in the film, the

exterior. The production company refused to pay the exorbitant fees requested and journeyed north to the city of Lincoln to film at Westminster's sister church, Lincoln Cathedral. This magnificent structure rests on a hill overlooking the enchanting medieval town, and the fee for filming inside was only \$100,000. Lincoln embraced the film and more than 200 locals were brought in as extras.

We stayed at the White Hart Hotel, where the cast stayed. You can reserve room 400, Ron Howard's room, where the cast is said to have had a late-night poker game, or any other room used by the actors, with no added fee for the star factor. The cast dined at many of the local restaurants and most have signed photos of the actors proudly displayed. My favorite was at Epernay, where the signed credit card receipts from Tom Hanks and Ron Howard, with the card numbers blackened out, are framed on the wall.

At the Old Bakery Restaurant, the owners had a copy of "The Da Vinci Code" signed by all the actors, Ron Howard and Dan Brown. They plan to auction the book to purchase an incubator for the children's hospital.

According to locals, the town is littered with ghosts, and you can take the nightly Lincoln Ghost Walk if you have the courage (Tom Hanks' family did). The next day we took a short ride out to Burghley House, which substituted for the pope's residence and other scenes in the film. It is England's largest and grandest house. Lunch is offered in the restaurant, featuring venison supplied by deer that graze the grounds.

We traveled by train to Edinburgh for the final leg of the tour, staying at the Balmoral Hotel, a regal palace where the cast also overnighted. My favorite site in town was the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre, where the guide introduced me to my soul mate, Highland Park Scotch whisky. Rosslyn Chapel is only six miles outside Edinburgh. The 15th century structure is where Hanks and Tautou uncover the truth of the Holy

Grail. The chapel is exquisitely carved and the artwork is full of biblical, Masonic, pagan and Knights Templar themes. Many believe that the Holy Grail and other treasures from the Crusades may lay buried below, but thus far the owners have not allowed excavation.

## **IF YOU GO**

Among the places we dined and stayed not mentioned in the book, but recommended by the tourist offices, included Le Faubourg ( [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com)), the Jardin d'Hiver ( [www.meuricehotel.com](http://www.meuricehotel.com)), L'Atelier Renault ( [www.atelier-renault.com](http://www.atelier-renault.com)), The Grain Store ( [www.grainstore-restaurant.co.uk](http://www.grainstore-restaurant.co.uk)), Tower Restaurant ( [www.tower-restaurant.com](http://www.tower-restaurant.com)) and brunch on the Eurostar.

In Edinburgh the magnificent Balmoral Hotel ( [www.balmoralhotel.com](http://www.balmoralhotel.com)) also hosted the wrap party, emceed by Tom Hanks in full Celtic attire.

For complete "The Da Vinci Code" tour information, lists of housing options, restaurants, special events, guidebooks and brochures, visit [www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com), [www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com), [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com), [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com) and [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com).

John Blanchette is a freelance travel writer.

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[TOP](#)