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# Where the **GREAT ART** hangs out

Before you go to Europe, read up on your favorite fields. Don't expect the Eiffel Tower to answer your life's questions—decide on what is great for yourself. Don't confuse art with artifice; a good cup of espresso is better than a bad museum. But don't miss the masterpieces when they're only blocks away.

Travel can be one of the most disappointing experiences in the world. When you plan a trip, you forget what it might feel like to be alone or not to know the language or to spend too much time planning and making arrangements and not enough doing. It is the high points—the manuscripts, the buildings, the masterpieces (often obscure) of various cities—that can fill the voids, that can give you the sense of fullness and excitement that just wandering or following the tours will never provide. Dublin is worth the whole trip to Europe just for its highlights. Most every city in the world has its obscure spectacular. (As for the rest of Ireland, it has some nice museums and some fine architecture, but I'll take the scenery over the interiors any day. It is the conversation and Guinness stout, the seacoast and green fields, that make me feel I could spend a lifetime there. The tourist points are mainly excuses for great rides in the country.)

England of course is jam-packed with great museums; don't by any chance miss some of the classics in London: The National Gallery (if you have taken an art history course and do not look at the Uccello, the Piero della Francesca, Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*, Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus*, and just about everything in that pleasantly small, well-planned, airy, human-scaled gallery, you should be shot), the Tate (Picassos, Giacomettis, Rothkos, and more and more and more), the Victoria and Albert (scary like the Louvre and Metropolitan, but a sense of what it means to try to categorize civilization), and the British Museum (the Elgin marbles are alive).

However, rather than stand in line and face the tour crowds in Westminster Abbey (I am told that Stonehenge is as bad), or hear the click of Instamatics at the changing of the guard—some of the usual British sights are no more emotionally satisfying than the Statue of Liberty or the Empire State Building—I would race to a few lesser-known musts. First there is the Courtauld Institute of Art on Portman Square. This gallery has only a few rooms, but they contain a wall of the best Cézannes anywhere, some first-class Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh, and, king of kings, Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergère*. I'll never forget collapsing on a bench in front of the Manet, feeling the hustle and glimmer of that mirrored bar and the quality of painted form as I never before understood it.

N.W.