



CHARUKESI RAMADURAI

HIGH FLIERS

ONE OF THE EARLIEST CONCORDES, built 1976, welcomed us to the Aeroscopia Museum. By the time it was retired in 2003, this lovely had flown close to 14,500 hours, and completed two round-the-world flights, in 1989 and 1993, flying at supersonic speeds for almost half the time. Two of the 20 Concorde ever built are at the Aeroscopia Museum near the Airbus factory in Toulouse. Along with them on permanent exhibition is a range of other aircraft, like the Caravelle (one of the first successful commercial jetliners, built in the mid-1950s) and the Super Guppy (a wide-bodied cargo aircraft operational for over 30 years). At the newly opened Aeroscopia Museum, visitors get to see not just stories of legendary aircraft, but also the history of aviation itself. A part of this is presented neatly in a timeline fresco that depicts significant flying moments over a century.

The 75,000 square feet exhibition hall at the heart of the museum houses 25 planes, including fighter jets like the MiG-15 and the Mirage. There are replicas of trailblazing aircraft: for instance, the Bleriot XI monoplane that in July 1909 succeeded in crossing the English Channel in 37 minutes (flying at a startling speed of 60kmph!), and the Morane-Saulnier monoplane used by Roland Garros to fly across the Mediterranean Sea non-stop for the first time in 1913.

One of the highlights at this interactive museum is the opportunity to explore the interiors of some great planes. And having wondered along with the world if the Concorde would ever fly again (really, the allure of this plane is intense—Paris to New York in three hours!), stepping into one was a veritable kid-in-a-candy-store moment. For aeronautic enthusiasts, the museum also has special areas themed around aircraft assembly and flight mechanics, and a 'looking to the future' corner. One of them focuses most interestingly on aircraft archaeology, a science that pieces together information on vanished planes.

As I stepped out of the museum, I found it hard not to feel awed by the stories of the intrepid men and women who dreamed of flying and eventually took to the skies. And I sent up a silent prayer to the powers-that-be that made it possible for me to fly back home from France in a matter of a few hours. (€11.50 per adult; musee-aeroscopia.fr/en)