

## Expo 2020 Dubai: How France used AR technology to bring Notre-Dame de Paris to life

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Photos: Dhanusha Gokulan / Supplied

**Watch detailed scenes from the coronation of Emperor Napoleon I to the ongoing restoration work at the cathedral.**

Will audio guides at museums soon be replaced by augmented reality (AR) apps? Quite possibly, yes. Take the month-long Notre-Dame de Paris exhibition at [France's Expo pavilion](#), for example.

Developed by the French start-up Histoverly and sponsored by L'Oréal, the display provides visitors with an immersive experience of the cathedral's 850-year-old history. Instead of reading facts and figures on a wall, guests will be able to see the Notre-Dame story unfold right in front of them – through a tablet called Histopad:



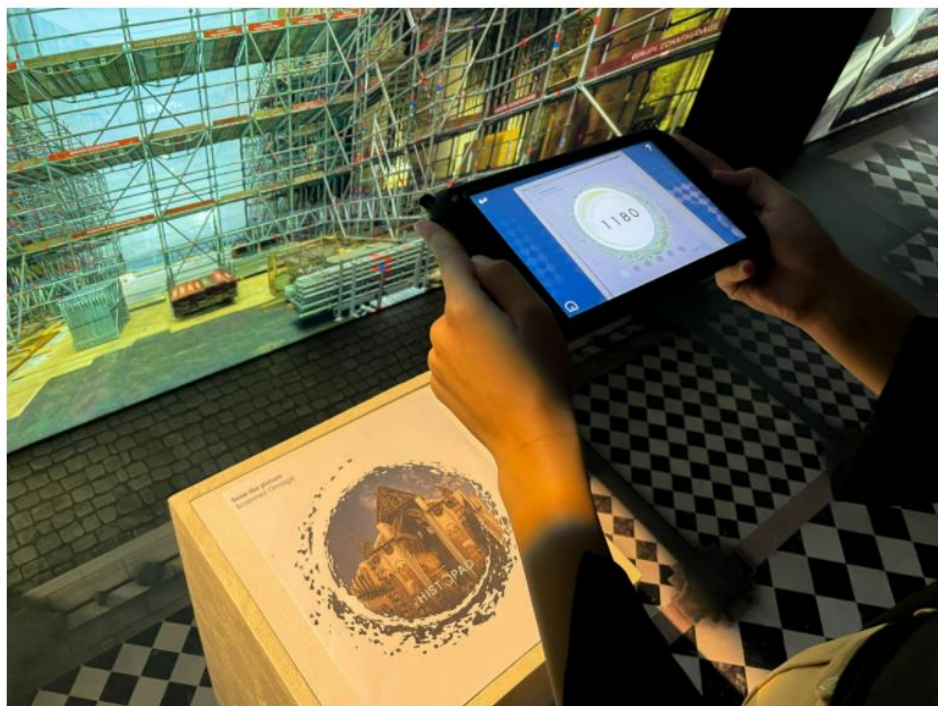
"Visitors equipped with tablets can go back in time and see the cathedral being built in the Middle Ages," Mathilde Michaut, a spokesperson for Histoverly, told *Khaleej Times*.

Viewers will also see the ongoing reconstruction of the iconic cathedral as if they are in Paris.

### How does it work?

Inside the 160sqm temporary exhibition space of the French pavilion, a total of six pictures from different phases of the cathedral's construction have been placed, with earliest stage dating back to 1180.

As visitors look at the pictures, they will see 'time capsules' that look like this:



"Using the the HistoPad tablets, visitors have to scan the time capsule in front of each of these images," explained Mathilde.

"Then, they will be able to witness detailed scenes from the coronation of Emperor Napoleon I on the HistoPad; see the Viollet-le-Duc spire being erected; and take a look at the operation designed to safeguard the structure since the fire, before the start of the reconstruction," she added.

Here's a preview of the experience:



### 'A world premiere'

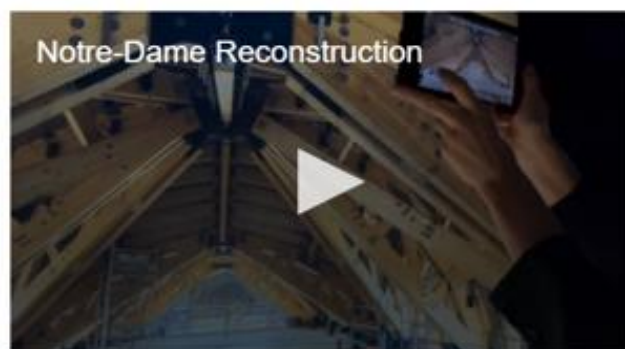
It's the first time that France is showcasing this unique, high-tech exhibition. The Expo display prefigures the AR exhibition 'Notre-Dame de Paris', which will take place at the Collège des Bernardins in the French capital in spring 2022.

"This larger exhibition is expected to tour Europe, the Americas and Asia while the reconstruction continues," Mathilde said.

In April 2019, a large fire partially destroyed the upper part of the famed Cathedral. Due to the tragic accident, the historical monument has been closed to tourists and worshippers until further notice.

The reconstruction project was momentarily halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, French President Emmanuel Macron said the goal remains to reopen the cathedral to worshippers in 2024 when France hosts the Olympic Games.

Here's how the site looks a few months ago:



Bruno de Sa Moreira, the CEO of Histovery, told *Khaleej Times*: “It has recently been reconfirmed – by Army General, Jean-Louis Georgelin, president of the Public Institution Responsible for the Conservation and Restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris, our official partner for the exhibition – that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a temporary suspension of the construction works.”

He added: “However, the safety works to secure the structure of the cathedral were finished last September, by the timetable.”

### **How augmented reality can change the museum experience**

Unlike virtual reality, which creates a cyber environment, AR overlays visual, auditory and other sensory information to objects in the real world using mobile or tablet computers.

Augmented reality is set to make the museum experience more interactive and self-directed, giving the arts and culture sector a much-needed boost in the post-pandemic world.

Moreira explained: “Our ambition is to ignite a passion for heritage among culture buffs, as well as people who are not used to walking into a museum’s or exhibition’s door. Augmented reality offers a new opportunity to bring vanished worlds back to life – to engage every visitor at his own pace, in his language, whatever his age or cultural background – thanks to interactivity. With the HistoPad exhibition, we are now able to bring heritage sites beyond their walls and borders to reach new audiences.”

To create all the AR content they need for the Notre-Dame exhibition in time for the Expo, the Histovery team started their production work in January this year.



The HistoPad AR has also been deployed in several other French cultural sites, and it has increased the interest in visiting these places, according to Moreira.

“It has gone up by 10 per cent at the Popes’ Palace in Avignon between 2017 and 2018. The interest is up by 20 per cent in the royal château of Blois between 2018 and 2019; by 100 per cent in the Falaise Castle between 2013 and 2017,” he said.

**Catch the exhibition until November 1**



According to Justine Weulersse, the content and programming director of the French pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai , the 'Notre-Dame de Paris, the Experience' will be open until November 1 .

“Five temporary exhibitions will succeed each other over the six months of the World Expo. Each month, an art exhibition will be featured: digital arts, plastic arts, fashion, tableware and architecture,” she said.