

Guided sightseeing tours

Listen to the story of Vendôme, a town of artistic and historic interest, told by a guide accredited by the French Ministry of Culture.

The guide who welcomes you knows every nook and cranny of Vendôme and he or she will give you the keys that unlock the town's history and highlight its development as you pass from one district to another.

1½ hours or slightly longer.

Tickets are on sale in the Tourist Office

Hôtel du Saillant

47 and 49 rue Poterie

41100 Vendôme

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Sightseeing on your own

If you prefer to go as you please, there are information panels on site at the numbered places of interest. The route is marked out by gilded nails.

Photographic credits

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The shape of a town

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The town over the centuries

Gracchus Babeuf © musée de Vendôme,

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A Heritage Trail

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"Miraculous Catch of Fish" fresco © François Lauginie.

Allegory of Justice: musée de Vendôme © Philippe Magnon.

Other photos

CPV + Antonin Veillith

At the source of the Loir,
Bubbling silver spring,
whose eternal course
flees to enrich the plain
of my paternal homeland,
be proud and honoured
to bathe it with your water.
No other French river
can wash one more beautiful...

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585) - Extract from Livre des odes

Listen to the Story of Vendôme, a town of artistic and historic interest...

The Culture Department has designed a programme of tours and, throughout the year, organises special events for local people and school groups. Its Heritage Unit will be pleased to discuss any project with you.

Information :

02 54 89 43 53

www.vendome.eu

culture@vendome.eu

If you are visiting with a group,

Vendôme offers tours all year with advanced booking.

Brochures can be sent to you on request.

For information, contact the Tourist Office: 02 54 77 05 07

Vendôme is a member of the national network of Towns and Areas of Artistic and Historic Interest

Since 1985, the French Ministry of Culture has operated a policy of special events designed to highlight heritage, in partnership with local and regional authorities. This has given rise to the awarding of the title "Towns and Areas of Artistic and Historic Interest". The commitments are laid down in an agreement signed by the Architecture and Heritage Department, regional cultural offices, decentralised offices of the Ministry of Culture and the relevant local and regional authorities.

The "Towns and Areas of Artistic and Historic Interest" network intends to share the aesthetic and social dimension of heritage sites in a dynamic, unusual way by providing local people, children and visitors with the keys to understanding what they see. The wide range of topics covered in tours, the variety of trails and the different approaches used are part and parcel of a requirement for quality on the part of the Architecture and Heritage leaders, a quality that is handed on by the tourist guides to people eager to learn about, and experience, the flavours and expertise available in the 149 towns in the network.

Sightseeing in the area

Visit Blois, the Perche area of Sarthe, the Loir Valley, Loire and Aubeis Valleys, Orléans, Tours, Loches, Chinon, Bourges, Le Mans, Towns and Areas of Artistic, Architectural and Historic Interest.

www.vpah.culture.fr

As I set off, I see places that were dear to my heart
as a child and that awaken memories of innocent games.
And you, the impressive mountain whose gaze over
the countryside so often delighted me during
my leisure; you have constantly seen me arrive

François Rouget (1808-1868) Adieu à mon pays



An urban layout

Any traveller anxious to gain the best possible impressions should approach Vendôme from the North. From the hillside sloping gently down to the suburbs, the first thing he sees are half-ruined towers jutting up into the sky...

Father Gabriel Plat (1877-1950) - "L'église de la Trinité de Vendôme" 1934

In the depths of the Loir Valley

During prehistoric times, the River Loir was split into several arms creating an area ideal for human settlement. This early settlement was soon followed by a cave dwelling dug into the hillside on the left bank. However, there is very little information about the layout of the original settlement. The first written mention of "Vendôme" ("...cum castellis Duno vel Vindocino...") dates from the Treaty of Andelot signed in 587 A.D.

On the southern rocky promontory stands the original castle keep. It probably replaced a Roman hillfort in the 11th century and, before the arrival of the Romans, there was probably a Gallic hillfort on the site. Holy Trinity Abbey was founded in 1032 and the first group of houses huddled round the original St. Martin's Church.

The fortifications

A fortified wall strengthened still further the protection afforded by the Loir, a natural moat that was more or less canalised. Tradition has it that the walls were erected after 1227, on the orders of Blanche of Castile and her young son, Louis IX, who came to

seek assistance and protection from Count John IV. Vendôme then had three parishes – St. Martin's, St. Bienheure's and St. Lubin's, all located in the southern suburbs.

In the 17th century, the walled town opened up

The fortifications were badly maintained and suffered damage every time the Loir burst its banks, losing their usefulness as a system of defence. Gradually, the local population "invaded" the river banks outside the walled town. On the south side, a new main entrance was opened into the castle (Beauce Gate) and a ramp was built, connecting it directly to the town. A number of religious orders built their enclosures in the town centre (Oratorians) and on the edge of the northern suburb (Capuchins, Ursulines, Daughters of Calvary).

19th-century transformations

In the early 19th century, the former Benedictine abbey was used as a cavalry barracks for 800 men. Three new bridges (Pont du Quartier, Pont de l'Abbaye and Pont de l'Islette) and the street known as Rue de l'Abbaye were constructed, linked to the Rochambeau district which occupied almost one-quarter of the old town centre. From 1858 to 1896, streets were gradually realigned (housefronts were rebuilt and roadways widened). The decision to demolish St. Martin's Church, which had been partially destroyed in 1857, gave the centre of Vendôme room for a square. Meanwhile, the suburbs continued to be covered with small market gardens. The railway,

built between 1864 and 1867, marked out the northernmost limits of Vendôme's urban development at that time.

Reconstruction and development in the 20th century

Almost one-quarter of Vendôme town centre had to be rebuilt after a fire caused by an air raid on 15th June 1940. The high demand for housing that was a feature of post-war France was met in Vendôme by the building of homes on the vast agricultural plains to the north of the town, between the railway and the hillside. From 1959 to 1966, Les Rottes (in

old French, "les routes" meant "small paths") consisted of 1,442 flats and 477 houses, in all covering an area of 83 hectares. In this new district, Notre-Dame Church is worth seeing for its sheer interior size. Built to an oval layout, it is topped by a dome, a thin sheet of concrete (7 cm thick) covering an area of 800 m². Main thoroughfares were laid out to manage traffic flows e.g. Avenue Gérard-Yvon (Le Mans direction) in 1967, Boulevard Kennedy from 1978 to 1980 and the diversion of the RN 10 (Bordeaux-Paris) in 1976.

The town today

Since the 1980s and 1990s, urban development has continued beyond the southern hill that once formed a natural barrier. Property development was carried out in the south, in the district of Les Aigremonts (meaning "scarp slopes"), distributing the population and activities over a town that now has 18,500 inhabitants within an area that boasts a population of more than 30,000.



One of the private mansions in Rue Guesnault provided author Honoré de Balzac with inspiration for the story of La Grande Bretèche.



Limestone rocks on the southern-facing hillsides..



The watergate or Great Meadow Arch spanning the River Loir.



Contemporary stained glass by Anne Huet, Church of N.-D.-des-Rottes.



Vendôme in the 17th century copied by Gervais Launay in the 19th century.



Private chapel of Our Lady of Pity.



St. Martin's Tower rings out the hours, providing a rhythm to life in Vendôme.

Down through the centuries

Nobody knows when the County of Vendôme came into being. All that is known is that it covered the ancient "Pagus Vindocinensis" or "Vendôme area" which was part of the "Civitas Carnutarum" or "Community of the Carnuti" of which Chartres (Autricum) was also a part.

*Raoul de St-Venant (1854-1927)
"Dictionnaire topographique, historique du Vendômois et de l'arrondissement de Vendôme"*

On the edges of the Anjou estate

In 1032, the arrival in power of Geoffroy Martel, son of Fulk Nerra, Count of Anjou, marked the beginning of Anjou's political influence over the County of Vendôme. During the second half of the 12th century, the town fell in turn into the hands of Henry II Plantagenet and King Philip Augustus of France. The territorial issues that arose from the incessant fighting undoubtedly led the Counts of Vendôme and Blois to set borders for their respective counties during the 14th century.

Vendôme became part of French history when it was the scene of a two-month trial of one of the peers of the realm. In 1458, Charles VII had a "seat of justice" set up in the castle and it was there that the Duke of Alençon was tried for collaborating with the English. By hosting the court, Count John VIII marked his loyalty to, and support for, the king.

Holy Trinity in Vendôme, a powerful abbey from the 11th century onwards

Abbot Oderic was the first to obtain the cardinal's hat, in 1066. This direct, privileged link between the abbey and the Pope remained in place until the French Revolution. Abbot

Geoffroy I (abbot from 1093 to 1132) increased the abbey's influence, especially through its decisive action during the Quarrel of Investitures. He enabled Pope Urban II to regain his position. This power regularly brought the abbey into conflict with the Counts of Vendôme but the disputes were settled by the signature of an agreement in 1185.

The Bourbon-Vendôme family

In 1371, after the death of Count Bouchard VII and his daughter Jeanne, the County of Vendôme passed to Catherine of Vendôme, respectively their sister and aunt. Her marriage to Jean de Bourbon-la-Marche gave rise to the House of Bourbon-Vendôme. The dynasty left its mark on the history of the country, then of the duchy from 1515 onwards. Countess Mary of Luxembourg (1462-1546), daughter of Peter

of Luxembourg and Margaret of Savoy, was a patron of the arts for half a century after the death of her husband François de Bourbon. She presided over the embellishments to St. James' Chapel, the St. George Gate, the collegiate church within the castle and the reconstruction of St. Martin's Church. On 20th October 1548, Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572) married Antoine de Bourbon (1518-1562), the second Duke of Vendôme. She was a Protestant but she made her mark during her short stays in the Roman Catholic Vendôme. In 1562, Huguenots profaned and pillaged the Collegiate Church of St. George. In 1793, the church, the burial place of the Bourbon-Vendôme dynasty in the heart of their castle, was ransacked and it is now nothing more than a heap of ruins. Henri IV besieged the castle and the town when it was in the hands of the Catholic Leaguers in November 1589.

Vendôme at the centre of revolutionary history

Located more than 120 km from Paris, the distance deemed necessary to ensure that a court of law could operate peacefully during a period of revolution, Vendôme was the seat of the High Court of Justice which heard the trial of Gracchus Babeuf, Augustin Darthé and their supporters. Eventually, the hearings (and the town!) became filled with the noise of loud debates and the controversies continued for more than seven months until the two main accused were executed and most of their sympathisers deported. In 1796, the leaders of the "Conspiracy of Equals" were arrested but their ideas were revived after the 1830 Revolution.

The air raid of 15th June 1940

Heavy losses in human terms (89 killed and more than 200 wounded) marked this violent episode in the town's history. The whole appearance of the historic town centre was also changed for ever. Some four hectares were flattened by the bombing and the fire that followed it. The law courts, governor's mansion and numerous half-timbered houses were all destroyed. Nowadays, there are some sixty timbered houses left, though many of them are concealed by rendering.

A town constantly on the move

The building of a high-speed train (TGV) station in 1990, bringing Vendôme to within 43 minutes of Paris, was accompanied by major changes in the town's economic fabric. It has particular expertise in three main, distinct sectors : aeronautics, domestic appliances and the automobile industry. Thanks to its wide range of shops and services, its dynamic cultural life and its many associations, Vendôme is now a regional centre for development covering an area that has a population of 70,000.



Cardinals and priests, a close-up of a stained-glass window in Holy Trinity Abbey Church.



Gracchus Babeuf, one of the leaders of the "Conspiracy of Equals", was tried and executed in Vendôme in May 1796.



The mansion that belonged to the Dukes of Vendôme, was demolished when the royal square was laid out in the late 17th century but it has given its name to a famous square in Paris.



A close-up of the copper wall of Le Minotaure, a theatre designed by Gaëlle Péneau.



A sculpture of a monk on the choir stalls in Holy Trinity Church.



The Flamboyant Gothic façade of Holy Trinity Church.



A close-up of the former Oratorians' high school.

Flavours and expertise

“Purchase apricots,
Melons, artichokes,
Strawberries and cream;
This is what I like in summer,
When, on the bank of the stream,
I eat to the sound of the water.”

*Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)
"Odelette du Bocage" de 1554 - Livres des odes de jeunesse.*



Place Saint-Martin in the town centre.



One of the 232 mediaeval manuscripts preserved in Vendôme's library. Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul (Ms 23 - F.165 - 12th century).



A sculpture of vigneron carved in the late 15th century on the choir stalls in Holy Trinity Church.



Harvesting on the hillside at Les Coutis.



A close-up of flower beds in the Ronsard Park.



A concert during the Rendez-Vous de l'Été summer festival.

Local wines

Although vines still grow in the Vendôme area, they have gradually lost pride of place to fields of cereal crops. Almost 90% of vineyards were pulled up after the Second World War. However, since the coveted “Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée” was awarded to “Coteaux du Vendômois” wines in 2001, producers can now emphasise the “local” aspect of their wines.

The Pineau d’Aunis is a capricious grape but it produces a wine with a characteristic peppery taste – fresh and “gris”. This area also expresses its character in its red wines, a blend of Pineau d’Aunis, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. Chenin Blanc grapes are the other happy surprise in this area of surface flint. They produce a dry wine with a citrus aroma, ideal with fish or local goats’ cheese. The best way of learning about the vineyards is to head for Les Coutis, where a visitors’ centre, an ampelographic garden (demonstrating the science of wine growing), orchard and viewing table provide insight into the very heart of this local tradition. And, of course, there is a breathtaking view of Vendôme.

Sweet delights

If you enjoy food, you’ll love this area! The history of Vendôme and the surrounding area is really something to get your teeth into! Local pastrycooks have created recipes that serve as reminders of famous people and well-known stories. Carrés Ronsard are filled with nougatine and praline; Croquignolles balzaciennes are made of almond meringue. Together they will take you on a “literary journey”. A Rochambeau (cookies and chocolate ganache) should be savoured beside the statue of the field-marshal who won fame and distinction in America during the War of Independence. Every confectionery and cake has its own minor or major history – find out what they are as you bite into a Croc’chamपालus, Sainte-larme, Malice du loup etc.

A garden city. Gardens in the town

Since the 17th century, Vendôme has boasted a unique garden heritage which has won it “4 flowers” in the national competition for urban floral displays and the top prize in the “Grand Prix National du Fleurissement” competition for ten years in succession. In the Ronsard Park and the gardens around the castle, there are countless trees, some of them more than two hundred years old and all of them of great botanic interest. The plane tree planted on the banks of the Loir in 1759 and the Lebanese cedar which has stood in the castle grounds since 1807 are the best-known of all the trees. The Council’s parks and environment department has long been skilled in the art of “mosaic planting”. The floral

frescoes are renewed each season; they can be seen near Square Belot, on the banks of the Loir and in the gardens round the library. There are also several plant collections (sages and highly-scented plants in the cloister garth in Holy Trinity Church). Fans can enjoy an outdoor botany lesson in some of the public gardens in Vendôme.

Festivals and shows

Throughout the year, there are so many special events to choose from. In springtime, there is the “Prokino” German Film Festival and the International Guitar Festival; in summer, there is a whole season of outdoor shows and entertainments including

“Photographic Walks”, meetings with storytellers and “Musical Walks through the Vendôme area”, a new festival organised by the Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, which gives young conductors a chance to hone their craft. In October, Vendôme vibrates to the sounds of the “Rockomotives”, a festival of today’s music famous for its ability to find new talent. In December, there is a Film Festival which rewards the best French and European shorts and medium-length films. The cultural season in Vendôme is fortunate to have all the technical advantages of the theatre called “Le Minotaure” designed by Gaëlle Péneau and inaugurated in 2002. With an

audience capacity of 760, the theatre welcomes more than 10,000 people through its doors every year.

Markets

Every Friday in the town centre and every Sunday in the district of Les Rottes, all types of goods fill the market stalls. Producers and market gardeners lay out their wares in the indoor market built in the purest of Baltard styles, spilling over into the nearby streets and squares (in the town centre) and along Avenue Clemenceau (in Les Rottes).

A Heritage Trail

From the playground in the old high school to venerable plane trees on the banks of the River Loir, see places steeped in history.



The main courtyard in the Town Hall.



A close-up of a carving in St. James' Chapel (chapelle Saint-Jacques).



The Islette Tower.



The Franciscans' wash-house (late 15th century).



The chancel in Holy Trinity Church.



Rue du Change in 1856, a water colour by Gervais Launay.

There are two sightseeing walks starting from the Tourist Office, together designed to show you all the heritage buildings in the historic town centre.

Walk One In the heart of the town

Town Hall

In 1623, Duke Caesar of Vendôme founded a college run by the Oratorians (a religious congregation set up in France in the 17th century). The building changed its name several times – it was a royal military academy in the late 18th century and the Ronsard High School in 1930. In 1969-1970, a new school was built in the north of the town and, in 1982, the unoccupied premises were refurbished for use as the Town Hall.

Erected between 1639 and 1777 in a design that suited the

aesthetic tastes of French Classical architecture, the brick and stone walls face the entrance gate in Rue Saint-Jacques, forming carefully-ordered façades overlooking the main courtyard. They are one of the finest examples of this style. Author Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was a pupil here for seven years. Tradition has it that he completed his punishment assignments locked in a closet in the old du Bellay Residence, now known as the Saillant Mansion and occupied by the Tourist Office.

Saint James' Chapel

In the 12th century, the “Chapelle Saint-Jacques” was used by pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The Flamboyant Gothic style of the chapel we see today results from 15th and 16th-century alterations. From 1623 onwards, the Oratorians,

who taught at the nearby high school, used it as their Order's chapel. After the French Revolution, it became a military store and, finally, a theatre before being returned to the Church in 1826. Since 1982, the chapel has been used as an exhibition centre. Rue du Change gets its name from the exchange bureau known to have existed here in 1354. It was widened in the 19th century and turned into a pedestrian precinct in 1978. The Post Office as we see it today moved, in 1956, into a former department store, “Les Nouvelles Galeries”, built in the early 20th century.

The Islette Tower

The Islette Tower was part of the fortifications built on the banks of the Loir in the 13th century. In the 18th century, the tower was abandoned, like the other defensive constructions. Some of them were then

partially demolished and re-used by the local people. Over the centuries, the Loir has flooded many times, damaging the town walls and the bridges originally built of wood. The Chartrain Bridge near the Islette Tower was rebuilt of stone in 1691.

The former Franciscan Friary

It was in the 13th century, after the departure of the Knights Templar, that this monastery became one of the largest communities in the Franciscan Order. In 1589, when the then Protestant Henri IV laid siege to the town, the monastery was pillaged in revenge for the resistance fomented by the Franciscans. After the French Revolution, the Benedictine order of the Daughters of Calvary bought and extended the convent before turning it into an

educational establishment. Vendôme Hospital took the property over in 1964 and has used it as a retirement home since 1971. Place de la Liberté was given its name in 1913. Once a small island covered with crops, it became an agricultural fair-ground when the course of the River Loir was changed.

The Pente des petits jardins

These meadows were wetlands in the Middle Ages but, in the 19th century, they were filled in with rubble from the town. Eventually the land on the banks of the Loir was developed, becoming Square Belot in 1898. The Army, which was garrisoned in Holy Trinity Abbey, built the bridges (Pont de l'Islette and Pont du Quartier) to improve access their barracks. Every year, new floral displays are laid out to form a mosaic on

the slope. In fact, all the parks and gardens do their utmost to provide Vendôme with a varied but high-quality display of flowers and shrubs.

The Watergate

This gate, which was fortified during the late 13th and 15th centuries, is also known as the Great Meadows Arch, after the land surrounding it. In the Middle Ages, the quantity of water in the Loir was regulated to supply power to the town's watermills. A dam was then built by the monks from Holy Trinity Abbey to ensure that the water flowed at the required rate through their own mill, the “Moulin Perrin”. Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585) mentioned the Loir Valley and the Vendôme area in his writings. The poet to the court was born in a manor house called La Possonnière some forty kilometres from Vendôme.

The east end of Holy Trinity Church

The Benedictine Holy Trinity Abbey included a church in the Romanesque style. In 1271, the monks decided that it was in a poor state of repair and they rebuilt it. A new chancel was erected c. 1308. The harmonious proportions and wide bays decorated with trefoil motifs are typical of Radiating Gothic architecture. It would appear that a private residence was built for the Cardinal-Abbot in the 12th century, away from the monks' communal dorters. The existing building corresponds to part of the 15th-century lodgings built in the Flamboyant Gothic style. Rue de l'Abbaye was laid out in the early 19th century after the monastery was demolished. The bridge (Pont de l'Abbaye) was completed in 1859 leading to what was once a cul-de-sac.

A Heritage Trail

From the ancient Benedictine abbey to the town's gates, all these picturesque places will tell you their own story.



Soldiers from the 20e Chasseurs à cheval (light cavalry) in front of the Rochambeau Barracks in the former Holy Trinity Abbey.



Maréchal de Rochambeau who was born in Vendôme. Statue by F. Hamar.



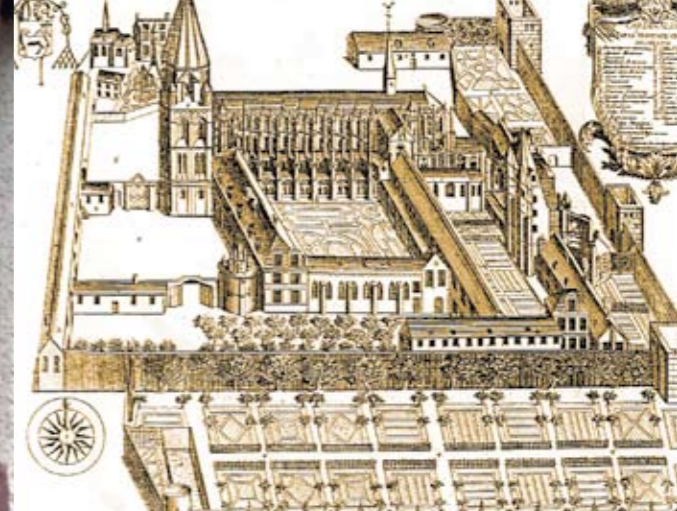
Numerous different botanic varieties (here, an Andean silver-leaf sage) bloom in the "Fragrance Garden" in the cloister garth.



A 19th-century stained-glass window showing the Assumption of the Virgin Mary by the Lobin Studio, in the Church of Mary Magdalen.



St. Louis on the Saint-Martin Residence..



A bird's eye view of Holy Trinity Abbey in the 17th century.

The Rochambeau Barracks

In 1791, the buildings of Holy Trinity Abbey were put up for sale. The premises housed a court, a prison and the sub-prefecture. In 1802, a cavalry regiment took the place over and, in 1886, it was named the Rochambeau Barracks. Almost thirty new buildings (stables, riding rings, storehouses etc.) were gradually added to the site. The 20e Chasseurs à cheval, a cavalry regiment that was decimated in 1914, were the last of the regiments stationed in Vendôme. The gendarmerie, the last occupants of the abbey buildings, moved into different premises close by in 1996. The original chapel was built when the abbey was founded in the 11th century. The wide bays in the south wall were opened up during the French Revolution to let more light into the prisoners' refectory. The hall retained its function as a canteen

in the 19th century when the buildings were used by the cavalry. Behind the building, you can see the original bay windows which were walled up, and a few column-piers.

The cloister garth

The cloister (from the Latin "claustrum": enclosure) was an area reserved for meditation by the monks. It was central to the operation of the Benedictine abbey and round it are the dormer, refectory and guests' rooms. The circular kitchen (like the one in Fontevraud) and the South Wing were replaced by a more impressive building which was needed by the Benedictine monks of the Order of St. Maur in the 18th century. Only the north section of the cloister gallery beside the church survived the demolition decided upon by the Army in 1907. The chapter house was used by the monks for daily meetings.

One of the walls in the room is decorated with particularly beautiful frescoes (late 11th/early 12th centuries) which were discovered in 1972 behind a 14th-century wall. The "Miraculous Catch of Fish" (John 21, vv. 1-14) remains the most beautiful of the scenes illustrating the events that occurred after Christ's Resurrection.

The West Front of Holy Trinity Church

In 1508, the virtuosity of the overseer, Jean Texier aka John of Beauce, combined with the expertise of the sculptors to produce the West Front of the minster in Holy Trinity Abbey. The "carved illumination" is a masterpiece of Flamboyant Gothic art and architecture. The church bell tower is also an exceptional construction, dating from the 12th century. It resembles the South Tower on Chartres Cathedral, dating from the same period.

The timbered houses

Many of the mediaeval houses in the centre of Vendôme include timbering, an inexpensive method of construction that was still used in the 18th and 19th centuries. The St. Martin House dating from the late 15th century consists of an assembly of timber posts supported on horizontal beams. On the ground floor, the four sculptures represent (left to right) St. Martin, St. James, St. John the Baptist and St. Louis.

Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, the future Maréchal de Rochambeau, was born in Vendôme on 1st July 1725. His statue, erected on Place Saint-Martin in 1900, serves as a reminder of one of the many military feats of this career Army officer. Rochambeau was

at George Washington's side during the victory in Yorktown in 1781, fighting for the cause of American Independence.

Walk Two A Stroll to the Castle

Church of St. Mary Magdalen

On 2nd June 1474, Count John VIII of Vendôme founded this church (église Sainte-Marie-Madeleine) with the backing of the townspeople, in particular the brotherhoods of vignerons and gardeners working on much of the land nearby. Although the building dates from the 15th century, the interior was restored in the 19th century and contains a fine set of stained-glass windows from the Lobin Studio in Tours.

The hospital next to Place de la Madeleine was opened circa 1620-1623 when the hospice was transferred to this site on the orders of Caesar of Vendôme. The hospital was originally run by a religious Order but was taken over by the State in 1905.

The library

Designed by architect Edouard Marganne, the building was constructed between 1866 and 1868 to house the library, the museum and the archaeological society. Spared by the air raid in June 1940, the building was then used as the Town Hall. The museum's collections were rehoused in Holy Trinity Abbey in 1953. After some alteration, the library has been the sole occupant of the building since 1986 when the Town Hall offices moved into the former Ronsard High School.

Gervais Launay (1804-1891), an art teacher at Vendôme High School with a passion for history and archaeology, produced the water colours that illustrate the information panels along the two routes. The original works are stored in Vendôme library.

Chapel of Saint-Pierre-la-Motte

This 11th-century chapel was part of a priory belonging to the monks of Saint-Georges-des-bois. After being sold in 1791 and altered several times, it would appear that only one-third of the building has survived. The interior layout reflects the austerity of the exterior of the small Romanesque building, now one of the oldest historic buildings in Vendôme.

A Heritage Trail

Stroll through the streets of the town and look at its historic monuments. This walk takes you through the pages of the town's history.



Sculpture in the chapter house.



Madonna and Child, a stained-glass window dating from circa 1125 in Holy Trinity abbey church.



Since 1467, the St. George Gate has housed the meetings of the Town Council.



A clay gargoyle made in a children's Arts workshop.



From the southern hillside, the castle and its park overlook the town.



Every Friday, the streets around the covered market are filled with the bustle of the market.

Former St. Martin's Church

St. Martin's Tower is the old bell tower of a church which once occupied almost the entire area of the square you see today. After the French Revolution, the many alterations weakened its structure and the vaulted roof collapsed in 1854. The church was finally demolished and its tower (late 15th/early 16th centuries) was turned into a belfry.

The carillon in St. Martin's Tower serves as a reminder of the only towns held by the heir to the throne, Charles VII, in the 15th century: "Orléans, Beaugency, Notre-Dame-de-Cléry and Vendôme".

Place du marché

Once known as Place du Pilon, the site of public executions until the 16th century, Place du Marché was originally no more than a wide street. To solve the traffic problems caused by the market, the town purchased and demolished a number of houses. The covered market on the site today was opened in 1896 and windows were added in 1981.

This district underwent extensive change after 15th June 1940 when Vendôme was bombed. A fire damaged the St. George Gate and destroyed buildings over almost one-quarter of the town centre. The district was then redesigned by architect Jean Dorian who updated the streets to meet the demands of the automobile.

New Bridge Gate

The wooden bridge linking the walled town to the courtyard in the castle in the 18th century collapsed because of lack of maintenance. The "New Bridge" (Pont Neuf) gate now keeps watch over this entrance. It is all which remains of the passageway that once connected the two fortified enclosures.

When Vendôme was ransacked on 19th November 1589, this gate was used by Henri IV's troops to enter and capture the town after their successful attack on the castle.

St. George Gate

This gate is the sole survivor of the four gates that once monitored access to the town. In 1437, Count John VIII granted a permanent concession for the gate to the town's aldermen, who then decided to hold their meetings in it. The gate was decorated with

medallions in the 16th century. Town Council meetings and weddings have again been held here since the gate underwent restoration in 1959 following the fire caused by the June 1940 air raid.

The "Fisseau House" next to the St. George Gate dates from 1947. Mr. Albert Fisseau, a master carpenter, built the timbered house. One of the dormer windows is particularly ornate.

17th-century castle

A 17th-century engraving of the castle gives some idea of the scale of the refurbishments commissioned by Duke Caesar of Vendôme. He ordered an access ramp and a gate to give the castle an opening to the outside world. Of the vast apartments built two centuries earlier, little remains except the base of the towers overlooking the ramp.

Rue Ferme below the castle stands on the site of the cast-

le's lower courtyard, a sort of security corridor overlooked by fortified gates. Most of the houses in the street were once occupied by the canons of the collegiate church in the castle.

Former Collegiate Church of St. George

From its building in the 11th century to the 17th century, the collegiate church in the castle housed the tombs of the Counts and Dukes of Vendôme, in particular Jeanne d'Albret and Antoine de Bourbon, the parents of King Henri IV. Unfortunately, when the castle was partially demolished after the French Revolution, the Bourbon-Vendôme sanctuary was also destroyed, having already been damaged in two attacks (in 1562 by the Huguenots and in 1793 by revolutionaries). The yew hedges planted in 1935 outline the layout of the building.

The castle's mediaeval enclosure

The first fortification, built in the 11th century, was a quadrangular keep at the north-west tip of the rocky promontory (outside the park we see today, in a private property called "La Capitainerie"). The mediaeval enclosure dated from the 12th century and some of its walls can still be seen today. The main Poitiers Tower still dominates the old layout by its sheer size. It was strengthened in the 14th century. The Dukes of Vendôme lost interest in the castle and it became Crown property in 1712 but it did not receive any more care as a result. In 1791, the castle's ruin was ensured

when it was sold off to several owners. The majestic cedar tree planted in 1807 is a symbol of its revival as a public park. The collapse of a tower and part of the outer wall in March 2001 explains the position of the ruins today, halfway down the grassy slope.

Famous men

Louis and I had so many punishments to do that we did not have six days of freedom during our two-year friendship. Without the books we borrowed from the library which kept our brains busy, this system of demands would have turned us into total idiots.

Honoré de Balzac - "Louis Lambert"

Honoré de Balzac

In his work, "Louis Lambert", he describes his seven years as a boarder in Vendôme High School (now the Town Hall). The book gives a glimpse of the strict discipline, probably a throwback to the school's previous status as a royal military academy. Balzac was, in his day, "the least active, laziest scholar in the school, as well as being the one most given to daydreaming and the one who collected the largest number of punishments." The reprimands were more or less

Pierre de Ronsard

He was born in 1524 at La Possonnière Manor in the village of Couture-sur-Loir. This poet to the court loved the Loir Valley and the Vendôme area. It was a birthplace dear to his heart because it was also the backdrop to his love affair with the beautiful Cassandra.

Duke Caesar of Vendôme

The illegitimate son of Gabrielle d'Estrees and King Henri IV was often involved in plots and intrigues. As Grand Admiral of the Fleet and Governor of Brittany, he divided his time between Paris and his castles

Henri IV

The third Duke of Vendôme, the son of Jeanne d'Albret and Antoine de Bourbon, attacked its castle and the town to subdue the Catholic Leaguers in November 1589, an event, which has remained in the popular memory. Governor Maillé de Bénéhart and a Franciscan friar were executed for their rebellion

severe, ranging from a caning to a punishment copied onto the "wooden shorts", the nickname given to the box beds in the dormitories.

Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur

The future Maréchal de Rochambeau (in 1791) was born on 1st July 1725 in Vendôme. He was a career army officer who was at George Washington's side during the victorious Battle of Yorktown in 1781. This victory was a decisive point in the American War of Independence. Rochambeau is buried in the graveyard in Thoré-la-Rochette, not far from the family's castle.

(Anet and Vendôme). He commissioned major projects in the town such as the founding of the Oratorians School (now the Town Hall) and the refurbishment of the castle. He died in his private mansion in Paris, a building which, although demolished, later gave its name to the royal square now famous for its jewellers (Place Vendôme).

The museum

In art, there are greater joys that are so deep and so spiritual that we are for ever obliged to the one who has given them to us.

Sacha Guitry - Extract from "Si j'ai bonne mémoire"

The permanent collections

The museum's extensive, varied collections are displayed in some of the buildings of the old Holy Trinity Abbey. A 17th-century stone staircase leads up to the first two floors; it originally led to the monks' dorter. The collections give an overview of Vendôme and the surrounding area, from a geological and archaeological point of view. Old trades, some of them no longer in existence, are illustrated in the ethnology room through a display of traditional tools. Such trades include tanners, glovemakers and clog-makers. As far as Fine Arts are concerned, the museum boasts a few exceptional pieces e.g. Marie-Antoinette's harp, the painted décor from the Château de Richelieu and the table used at the Babeuf trial. The room dedicated to delftware displays some major items produced in Rouen and Nevers.

The temporary exhibition gallery

It is regularly used for special events featuring history, ethnology, fashion etc. An area specially designed for contemporary art hangs new works by internationally famous artists every year.

Sculptor Louis Leygue

Prix de Rome in 1931, he donated a large number of sculptures, medals and drawings. The latter are displayed on a roster basis. In the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Rottes, the altar, font, lectern and some of the wall decorations were created by Louis Leygue circa 1968.

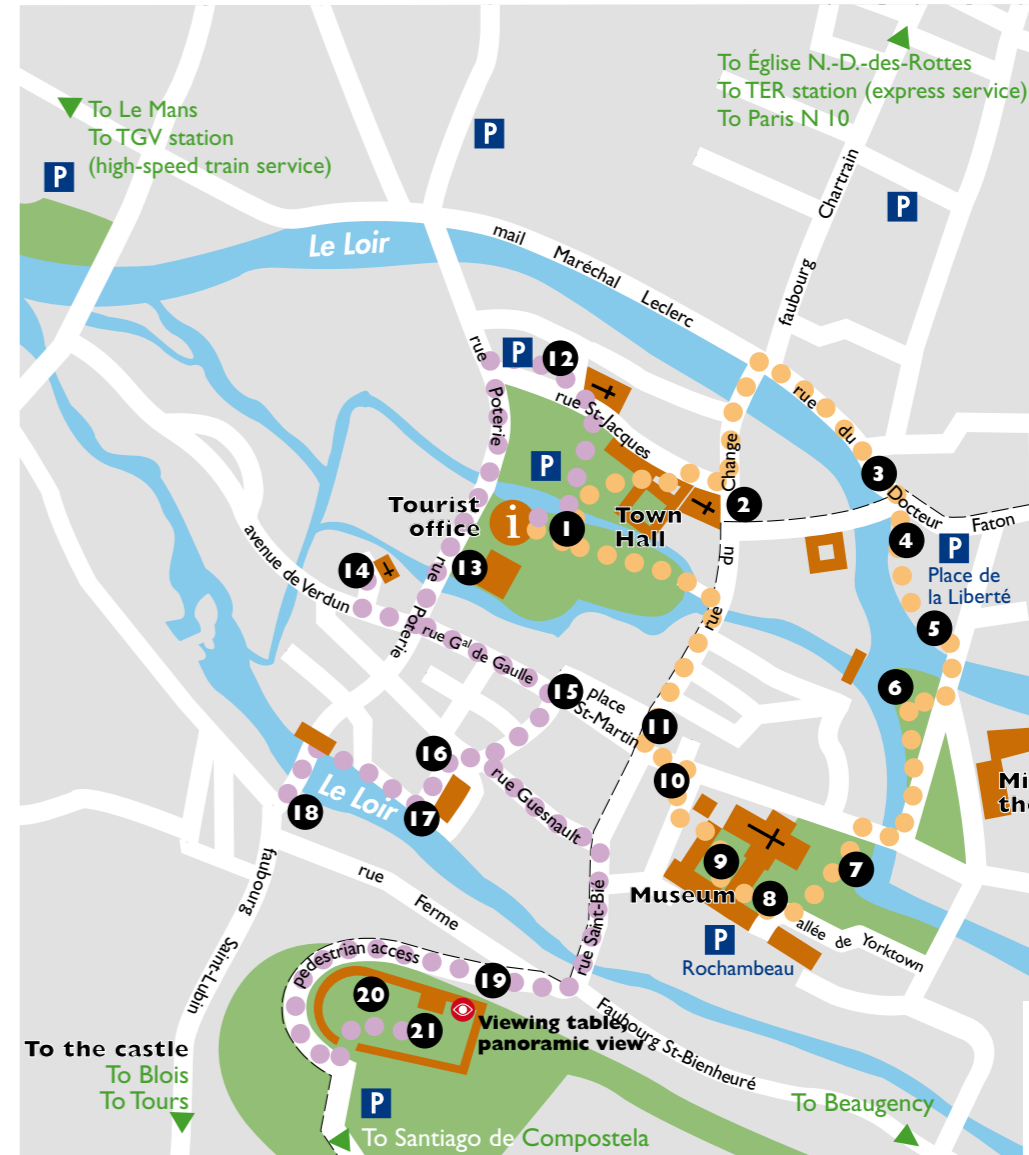
Practical information

cloître de la Trinité
41100 Vendôme
Tel : 02 54 77 26 13
opening times : 10 a.m. noon and 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. daily except Tuesdays.
Closed 1st January, 1st May, 25th December and Sundays from November to end of March.

The Education Department

The Education Department arranges teaching workshops during school terms and holds art classes on Wednesdays.

There are two sightseeing walks starting from the Tourist Office, together designed to show you all the heritage buildings in the historic town centre.



Historic buildings on the trails

"In the heart of the town"

- 1 Town Hall.
- 2 St. James' Chapel.
- 3 Islette Tower.
- 4 Former Franciscan Friary.
- 5 Pente des petits jardins (flower displays).
- 6 Watergate.
- 7 Chevet of Holy Trinity Church.
- 8 Rochambeau Barracks.
- 9 Cloister garth.
- 10 West Front of Holy Trinity Church.
- 11 Timbered houses.

"A stroll to the castle"

- 12 Church of St. Mary Magdalen.
- 13 Library.
- 14 Chapel of Saint-Pierre-la-Motte.
- 15 Former St. Martin's Church.
- 16 Marketplace (Place du Marché).
- 17 New Bridge Gate.
- 18 St. George Gate.
- 19 Castle in the 17th century.
- 20 Former Collegiate Church of St. Georges.
- 21 Mediaeval castle enclosure.

— — — Pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela (GR 655 west or GR 35)

