

HISTORICAL WALKS

SAUMUR, TOWN OF ART AND HISTORY



SAUMUR HISTORICAL WALKS

« THE WHOLE HISTORY OF FRANCE IS THERE. NEXT TO A TOTTERING HOUSE WITH ROUGHLY PLASTERED WALLS, WHERE AN ARTISAN ENSHRINES HIS TOOLS, RISES THE MANSION OF A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN, ON THE STONE ARCH OF WHICH ABOVE THE DOOR VESTIGES OF ARMORIAL BEARINGS MAY STILL BE SEEN, BATTERED BY THE MANY REVOLUTIONS THAT HAVE SHAKEN FRANCE SINCE 1789. Honoré de Balzac / Eugénie Grandet, 1833.

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Document produced by the Council of Elders of the city of Saumur with the participation of the neighbourhood committee of the Fenet district.

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BETWEEN LOIRE AND HILLSIDE : FENET DISTRICT AND ROYAL CHAPEL

Duration (without visiting time) : 1h30
Difficulties: none

- Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** • Departure in front of the town hall, pass the porch into the courtyard and exit on the left into Rue Bonnemère. Head for Saint Peter's church (Saint-Pierre) by taking Rue du Puits Neuf.
- Place Saint Pierre** - Take at the right of the church into Rue Haute Saint-Pierre and follow straight ahead until the Place Notre Dames des Ardilliers.
- Maison des Anges** (House of Angels)
- Castle**
- The manufacturers of rosaries, Rue Jean Jaurès**
- House of Jeanne Delanoue Rue Rabelais**
- Notre-Dame des Ardilliers** • (Royal Chapel Our Lady of Ardilliers) - Return via the Quai Mayaud, Place Saint-Michel and Place de la République.
- Papegault Tower**
- Hôtel Belvédère**

NICE PANORAMAS, THE CASTLE AND BEAUTIFUL PRIVATE MANSIONS

Duration (without visiting time) : 2h00
Difficulties : some steep gradient

- Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** • Departure in front of the town hall, pass the porch into the courtyard and exit on the left into Rue Bonnemère. Head for Saint Peter's church (Saint-Pierre) by taking Rue du Puits Neuf.
- Place St Pierre** • At the corner of the square take the Montée du Fort and continue to the castle.
- Maison des Compagnons** (House of the journeymen)
- Panorama Castle**
- Panorama Rue des Moulins with viewpoint indicator** – Return to the castle's car park, take the Rue Cristal and enter the Jardin des Plantes (botanical garden).
- Garden-city of the Moulins district**
- Jardin des Plantes** • Take the exit at the bottom of the garden and turn left towards the church.
- Church Notre-Dame de Nantilly (Our Lady of Nantilly)** – Take the Rue Pascal, the Rue des Basses-Perrières and the Rue du Temple to go back to the town centre.
- Protestant church and fortifications.**
- Private mansions** • Take the Rue du Marché to go back to the Place de la République.

SAUMUR, EQUESTRIAN AND MILITARY QUARTER AND THE SAINT-NICOLAS DISTRICT

Duration (without visiting time) : 1h30
Difficulties : none

- Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall)** • Departure in front of the town hall, pass the porch into the courtyard and exit on the left into Rue Bonnemère. Head for Saint Peter's church (Saint-Pierre) by taking Rue du Puits Neuf.
- Place St Pierre** - Turn right into Rue Dacier.
- Maison du Roi** (The King's House) - Turn right into Rue de l'Ancienne Messagerie.
- Hotel des Abbesses de Fontevraud and Rue Bizard** - Follow Rue Saint-Jean and Rue Saint-Nicolas to the Cavalry School.
- Cavalry Museum and Military Schools** - Go back to Rue Saint-Nicolas, turn left into Rue des Carabiniers de Monsieur and Place Saint-Nicolas.
- Lantern of the Dead**
- Boule de Fort**
- Saint-Nicolas Church** - Take the Rue de la Petite Bilange, the Place Bilange then the Rue Molière to return the town hall.
- Hôtel Blancler**
- Theatre**



THE TOWN OVER THE CENTURIES

The history of Saumur distinguishes itself by a succession of good times, each of them left its marks in the town: privileged stage of the dukes of Anjou, European capital of Protestantism, French capital of the military horsemanship and innovative centre of wine making. Today, the town of Saumur is in the heart of the Loire Valley area which is included on the list of the sites of World Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

BETWEEN LOIRE AND HILLSIDE: FENET DISTRICT AND ROYAL CHAPEL

The district of *Fenet* has medieval origins and developed thanks to the pilgrimage of *Notre-Dame des Ardilliers* (Our Lady of Ardilliers), which has known its golden days in the 17th century. Many manufacturers of rosaries (locally called *patenôtriers*) settled in the neighbourhood: their houses have kept track of their shops. Some families made their fortune as evidenced by the superb private mansions built on the *Mayaud* quay. Nowadays a peaceful suburb, you should imagine the life which reigned in the harbour, in the hostleries full of travellers and in the workshops of the rosary manufacturers. Along the river, on the hillside, you can see former troglodyte dwellings.



1 Hôtel de Ville (Town hall): Dating back to the 15th century, it was a fortified bastion built into the urban wall. In 1860, the architect Charles Joly-Leterme extended the edifice with a Neo-Gothic building. The *Rue Bonnemère* along the town hall was named in memory of Aubin Bonnemère from Saumur who joined the rebellious people in Paris in July 1789. He gave to his hometown a stone of the Bastille which, since 1880, is sealed on the facade of the town Hall.

2 Place St Pierre: This heart of the medieval city was long reduced to the dimensions of the forecourt in front of the church. Until the 18th century there was the Royal Palace, former courthouse. On either side of the square were the streets of Hell (the *Ruelle de l'Enfer* is still accessible to the left of the facade) and Paradise (now *Rue Dacier*). The half timbered houses date back to the 15th and 16th centuries. The church of St. Peter (12th and 13th centuries) houses a beautiful set of stalls. The restored facade bears the arms of Cardinal Girolamo Grimaldi who participated financially in its reconstruction after the collapse in 1674.

3 Maison des Anges (House of Angels): At No. 13-15 *Rue Fourrier*, the House of Angels is a beautiful private mansion dating from the 17th century. The cherubs decorating the facade wear rosaries around their necks and evoke the activity of the rosary manufacturers in the neighbourhood.

4 Castel: The north facade of the castle dominating the *Place Saint-Michel* presents a building of the end of the 14th century: the Duke Louis I of Anjou, brother of the King Charles V, began to rebuild the castle to give it the appearance depicted in the famous miniature of the *Très Riches Heures*, the book of hours of the Duke of Berry. Around the castle stands the impressive bastion built by the Protestant Governor Philippe Duplessis-Mornay in the 1590s. This bastion collapsed in April 2001 and its reconstruction was the largest building site of the French Historical Monuments' institution at the beginning of this century.



5 The Rosary manufacturers, Rue Jean Jaurès: In the houses built on both sides of this street the manufacturers made and sold their objects of piety. These houses, often modest, are identifiable by the arcades of their shops. According to a local tradition General Bontemps, a military chaplain who became a general in the Napoleonic army, was born on June 1, 1753 at No. 11 of that street. From No.63 to No.75 were the steam engines implanted between 1859 and 1861 by the company Mayaud which mechanized the making of rosaries and medals. A metal walkway connected the offices on one side of the street with the workshops on the other side (only the door to the first storey remains).

6 House of Jeanne Delanoue, Rue Rabelais: It is in the district of *Fenet* that Sainte Jeanne Delanoue established in 1704 the congregation of the sisters of Sainte-Anne of Providence. In 1716, the community moved to No. 33, former hostelry of the Three Angels dating from the 16th century. Jeanne Delanoue was canonised by John Paul II in 1983.

7 Royal Chapel of Ardilliers (Chapelle royale Notre-Dame des Ardilliers): The chapel, together with the House of the Oratorians raised behind its apse, form one of the most beautiful monumental complexes due to the Counter-Reformation in the Loire Valley. The chapel is distinguished by a spectacular rotunda, built between 1655 and 1695, inspired by Roman churches. Along the *Quai Mayaud* are the imposing facades of the private mansions of the Mayaud and the Charlemagne families.

8 Tour Papegault: Former corner tower of the 15th century urban wall, it is located near the old port of *Saint-Michel*. It takes its name from the wooden parrot (in old French called papegay or papegault) once attached to its summit to serve as a training target for archers and arquebusers.



NICE PANORAMAS, THE CASTLE AND BEAUTIFUL PRIVATE MANSIONS

The rocky spur, which rises to 40 m, welcomed in the 10th century the abbey of Saint-Florent and the first fortification of the count of Blois then Lord of Saumur. In order to cultivate their vineyards, the Benedictine monks cleared the hill. Limestone and wine will be exported from the Middle Ages via the river, beyond the borders. The district of Nantilly is halfway down the slope, down to the valley of Thouet. This old village is at the crossroad of ancient Roman roads joining Poitou and Touraine through the ridge way to avoid the banks of the Loire, often impassable (many floods). The habitat of the Nantilly neighbourhood is made up of modest houses of artisans built on a network of underground galleries from which the tufa stone was extracted.

1 Hôtel de Ville: See blue itinerary

2 Place St Pierre: See blue itinerary

10 House of the Journeymen (Maison des Compagnons): At the top of the *Montée du Fort* remains a 15th century house restored identically by the master journeymen of the Tour de France. It is the only testimony of the medieval habitat that had developed inside the bailey, that is to say, the enclosure of the 11th century that protected the lower yard of the castle.



11 Panorama Château: Just before passing the fixed bridge giving access to the castle, the view of the slate roofs of the city allows to discover the twisted spire of Saint Peter's culminating at 69 m. Erected on a rocky spur, the old keep and royal fortress became the luxurious residence of the Dukes of Anjou in the 14th century. This only «gothic» castle in the Loire Valley was bought by the council in 1906 and houses a rich collection of decorative arts labelled Museum of France.



12 Panorama, Rue des Moulins: The Loire, the *Cessart Bridge* (1768), the Islands *Offard* and *Millicheau* are clearly visible from the esplanade. Situated at the edge of the hillside, in the *Rue des Moulins*, 32 windmills (vestiges) can be numbered, testimonies of the former millers' community. The families gave their names to their mills. On the limestone plateau, as soon as you cross the urban limits, the green immensity of the vineyard is spreading out.



13 Garden City of the Moulins district (Cité-jardin des Moulins): In 1928 the law called Loucheur demanded a hygienic dwelling, sufficiently spacious, where «ventilation, heating, thermal insulation, defence against water and moisture should be carefully studied.» In the early 1930s, the HBM Office (Habitations à Bon Marché = cheap accommodation) of Saumur created many social housing including the garden city of *Moulins* sometimes called «Swiss village» or «Cité Cristal» (Antoine Cristal was a famous winegrower and local politician). This housing estate that combines concrete and fabricated interlocking tiles contrasts with the old buildings made of tufa stone and slate.



14 Botanical garden (Jardin des Plantes): This terrace space was built in the 17th century by the Recollects brothers who settled on the heights of the district of Nantilly. From the convent, which was destroyed during the Revolution, remains the lodging of the father superior (18th century). The council acquired the terraces and gardens at the beginning of the 19th century and commissioned the Agricultural Council of Saumur to establish a botanical garden and a school specialised in wine growing. The establishment was dissolved in 1967 and the plants torn off. Today the terraces reveal green spaces scattered with lime trees, oaks and hornbeams.

15 Church Notre-Dame de Nantilly (Our Lady of Nantilly): This Romanesque building from the 12th century is the site of an important Marian pilgrimage (Black Virgin). Between 1470 and 1483, King Louis XI commissioned a vast collateral in Flamboyant Gothic style supposed to accommodate the parishioners because the Romanesque nave was now reserved for the new royal chapter. The establishment of the canons failed and the chapter finally settled in the collegiate church of *Le Puy-Notre-Dame*. The organ of the gallery is classified as Historical Monument.



16 Protestant church and fortifications: The today's Protestant church (in French called *Temple*) was built in 1843 on the plans of the architect Charles Joly-Leterme. Under the portico are sealed the Tablets of the Law from the ancient Protestant church what was built nearby in the 17th century by the Protestant governor Duplessis-Mornay. About forty meters high, the *Grénetière Tower*, built in the 15th century, was the largest tower of the town's defensive system. It takes its name from its use as a wheat granary in the 17th century. From 1664 until the French Revolution it served as a prison for salt smugglers. The urban wall of the 14th and 15th centuries measured 1.1 km and included about twenty towers and five gates.



17 Private mansions: the *Rue du Temple* presents a high number of mansions often financed by families related to the administration of the town and its various jurisdictions. At No. 11, the *Sourde* mansion is one of the most beautiful in the neighbourhood and belonged in the 17th century to the family Chesnon de Sourde, but the tradition in the Saumur area wants that this house was also owned by Louis Cappel, professor of Hebrew at the Protestant Academy.



SAUMUR, EQUESTRIAN AND MILITARY QUARTER AND THE SAINT-NICOLAS DISTRICT

The Saint-Nicolas church was built at the end of the 12th century on a marshy ground regularly subjected to floods of the rivers. Around the church and the port Saint-Nicolas developed in the Middle Ages a district of craftsmen, merchants and sailors. In spite of the essentially commercial vocation of the district, mansions occupy large plots at the banks of the river. In the second half of the 18th century, the Saint-Nicolas district changed its physiognomy thanks to the establishment of the Barracks of the *Carabiniers de Monsieur* (mounted riflemen), which later became the Cavalry School and nowadays the Military Schools of Saumur. The vast meadow of *Chardonnet* is transformed into a place of arms around which extend the riding halls and stables.

1 Hôtel de Ville: See blue itinerary

2 Place St Pierre: See blue itinerary

18 Maison du Roi (The King's House): This is a remain of a 15th century building that was one of the most important private lodgings in the town. Its name comes from the illustrious guests that the building has hosted: the kings Charles VII, Henry IV, Louis XIII, the young Louis XIV, as well as Queen Mary of Medici and Queen Mother Anne of Austria.



19 Hôtel des Abbesses de Fontevraud and Rue Bizard: At No. 6 *Rue de l'Ancienne Messagerie*, a richly carved 19th century portal marks the presence of an important mansion that belonged to the Abbesses of Fontevraud. *Rue Bizard* bears the name of a family of lawyers of the 17th and 18th century, the most famous of which, Maurice Bizard, was mayor of Saumur and deputy of the Estates General. *Rue Franklin Roosevelt*: in order to relieve the enclosed town and to facilitate the crossing of the urban area, the engineers of the «Ponts et Chaussées» (Corps of the Bridges and Roads, founded by the minister Colbert in 1669) proposed since 1744 a new route of the Loire crossing. The completion of this large thoroughfare (8 km of a straight route crossing the town from north to south) and the *Cessart Bridge* led to the redevelopment and embellishment of new streets and the waterfront of the Loire.



20 Cavalry Museum and Military Schools: The establishment of the Royal Corps of Carabiniers in the floodplains of the *Chardonnet*, ordered in 1763 by the minister Choiseul, involves the construction of imposing barracks and many buildings constituent the equestrian activity (riding halls, stables, fodder storage ..., a military enclave of 42 ha today). In 1825, the institution became the famous School of Cavalry with the *Cadre Noir* as instructor body. The place is named after an officer who became an explorer then a hermit in the Algerian Sahara where he was assassinated: Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916). The Cavalry Museum is housed in former stables of the 19th century.



21 Lantern of the Dead: The former St. Nicolas Cemetery, located southwest of the church in marshland, was regularly flooded and was therefore moved. Just some remains of a 15th century chapel subsist, once surmounted by a lantern of the dead.

22 Boule de fort: This game remains an extremely lively tradition in the heart of the Saumur area, which still includes 140 social clubs. It is practiced with a kind of a ball made of sorb tree wood, iron hooped, with a concave side called «weak» and another convex called «strong», «fort» in French, hence its name. The sailors would have invented the game by playing it in the bottom of their boat. This is the most widespread version of the origin of this sport.

23 Saint-Nicolas Church: Saint-Nicolas was the parish of the Loire sailors and first recorded in 1145, probable date of the construction of the church. In the 18th century, the entrance at the west facade was moved to the east, at the site of the current bell tower, the ground level rose to avoid the floods and the vault of the central nave was raised. The new portal is decorated with a 20th century mosaic depicting scenes from the life of Saint Nicholas.



24 Hôtel Blancier: The Blancier mansion dominates the *Place de la Bilange* and participates in the embellishment projects of the town in the 18th century. It is built between 1780 and 1786 for Pierre-Antoine Blancier, rich merchant. The ground floor of his house is reserved for shops, while part of the floors are for renting. The *Blancier* mansion is at the same time a prestige achievement, a commercial headquarter and an investment property. The decoration of the facade is of the purest Louis XVI style.



25 Théâtre: The name of the square «*Bilange*» comes from the scales (balance in French / bilanz in Latin) which were used to weigh the goods of fairs and markets on which the Abbess of Fontevraud collected taxes in the Middle Ages. The opening of the *Cessart Bridge* in 1768 disrupted the configuration of the square and made it the main entrance to the town: it benefitted from a monumental treatment. In 1788 is built a first auditorium associated with a stock exchange and a covert market. The whole is destroyed in 1863 to be replaced by the present theatre, according to the plans of the architect Charles Joly-Leterme. The interior consists of an Italian-style theatre classified as Historical Monument.

