

Glossary

Bell tower: building housing one or more bells.

Chatelet: gateway flanked by two towers.

Hundred Years' War: series of conflicts between the kings of France and England from 1337 to 1453.

Oriel: upper-floor bay supported by corbels (stone blocks projecting from a wall).

Outwork: built against another, larger building.

Panelling: wood and floor covering made of thin strips of wood.

Sainte-Chapelle: royal chapel built by Saint Louis to house the relics of Christ's Passion (the Crown of Thorns, a fragment of the Holy Cross, the sponge and the spear).

Trinity: symbolic representation of the unity of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead.

Practical information

Visit takes on average: 2 hours.

Guided tours.

Audio guide tours available in French, English, German, Spanish and Italian.

Tours suitable for disabled visitors.



The Centre des Monuments Nationaux publishes a collection of guidebooks about French monuments, translated into several languages.

Éditions du patrimoine publications are on sale in the bookshop-giftshop.

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15 Wall and towers

The wall was part of Charles V's great plan to transform Vincennes into a real fortified city. 1100 metres long and marked out with nine towers, it protects a vast area where several hundred people used to live. The towers, each 40 to 42 metres high, were used both as living quarters and defensive features. Seven of them were levelled to hold cannons when Napoleon I converted Vincennes into a military stronghold.

In the 19th century, blockhouses were built against the ramparts.

The Village Tower (A) is the original main gate and still stands at its original height. Its exterior façade was once adorned with statues, following the example of the keep's chatelet. The

Les Salves (B) and **Le Bois (C) Towers** were also gateways with drawbridges, and they too were adorned with sculptures.

16 The classical pavilions are part of the major work carried out from 1654 at Mazarin's and then Louis XIV's request. The perfectly symmetrical King's pavilion on the right and the Queen's on the left, the openings made in the south rampart, the Le Bois Tower converted into an *arc de triomphe* (victory arch) and the arcades combine to form a coherent group in classical French style.

17 The weaponry pavilion dates back to the reign of Louis XVIII (1815-1824) when it was used to house an artillery arsenal, its doors being wide enough for huge instruments of warfare to pass through.

Nowadays, the pavilions are home to libraries and part of the Ministry of Defence's Historical Service archives.

A national memory site

Since 1948, the Castle has played host to the historical services of the French Army, Air force and Navy, and then the Gendarmerie. In 2005, these were combined within the French Ministry of Defence's historical service, whose comprehensive compilation of archives and libraries makes it France's third largest collection after those of the National Archives and National Library. The presence of the Defence archives in this monument, which is open to the public, makes Vincennes a major national memory site.

An exemplary project

Restoration work which began just after the Second World War is still going on today, requiring the keep to be closed for 12 years. Since 1994, archaeological digs and scientific studies of unprecedented magnitude have greatly added to our knowledge of the Middle Ages. The restoration of the keep has revealed the existence of its original decor and the systematic use of iron to consolidate its structure. Digs on the site have revealed an extensive hydraulic network and shown the various periods in the manor's construction.

This extensive restoration work was vital if the Castle of Vincennes, a key stage in the history of art and one of Europe's greatest Medieval castles, was to go on standing the test of time.

Vincennes Castle

Witness to France's history

A fortified royal residence

The Capetian monarchs established a hunting lodge in the forest of Vincennes in the 12th century. At the start of the Hundred Years' War*, John II, known as John the Good (1350-1364)** initiated work on a keep nearby, which his son, Charles V (1364-1380) completed circa 1370. A protective wall with nine towers was then built around the keep and manor.



15th-century miniature.

At the time of Charles V's death, work on the Holy Chapel, whose

portal was to be one of the first high Gothic masterpieces, had just begun. During the troubled periods of the 16th and 17th centuries, the monarchs took refuge behind the huge castle's walls. Further building work marked Louis XIV's (1643-1715) sporadic presence before he finally settled in Versailles in 1682.

Military stronghold

Vincennes thus lost its status as a Royal residence, but from the Revolution on became a major arsenal. Napoleon consolidated this military calling by his Decree of 16 March 1808, and levelled the wall towers to adapt the site for modern artillery use.

* Explanations overleaf.

** Start and end dates of reign.

I The Capetian Manor

Archaeological digs beneath the lawn and central alley have revealed the foundations of the manor; a set of buildings that gradually sprang up around a courtyard in the 13th and 14th centuries. The manor became Saint Louis' favourite residence and played host to key events in royal family life, notably the birth of its first born. It was gradually destroyed from the 17th century onwards.

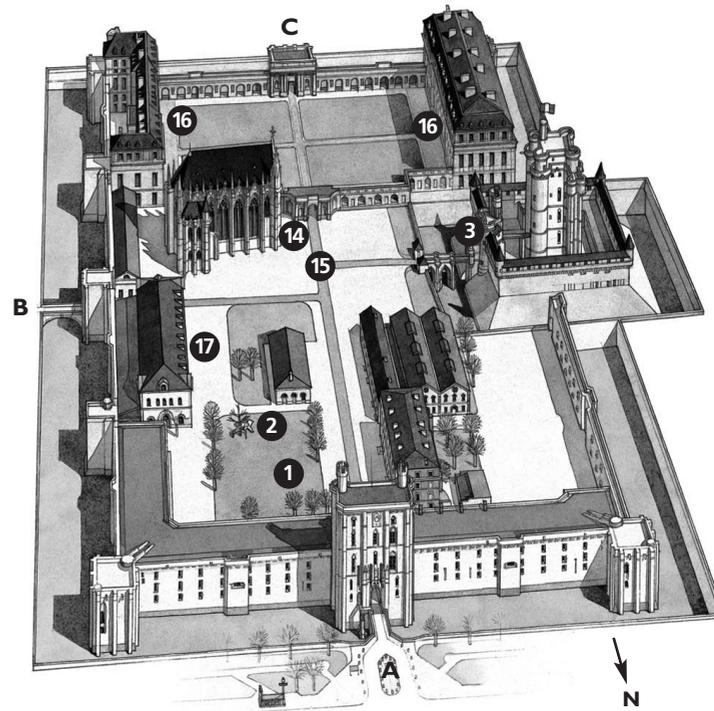
- 2 A fountain** was built in the centre of the manor courtyard in the 13th century, supplied by a sophisticated hydraulic system and an extensive network. Rebuilt under Charles V, the fountain is now the only visible sign of the manor.

The keep

- 3 The chatelet*** forms the main entrance to the keep. Its façade was originally adorned with a huge sculpted design. Visitors used to be greeted by statues of Charles V, his wife Jeanne de Bourbon, and Saint Christopher, with the Trinity*, a symbol of divine protection, standing over them.

The keep, or donjon, is an architectural feat and the expression of remarkable political determination: it was built quickly, and at great cost. This huge square tower, flanked by four corner turrets, is divided into six floors with rooms whose archways rest on a single slender central column. Each floor has the same layout, with a huge central hall and rooms in each corner turret. Standing 50 metres high, it is the tallest medieval keep in France.

It is protected by a wall and a deep moat, originally filled with water. In the courtyard on the left, you can climb the oldest preserved example of an outwork* stairway, lit by five openings, one above the other.



- 4 The chatelet terrace** provides a view over the whole of the site. On the keep side, angel musicians, prophets and fantastical characters can be made out on the sculpted consoles framing the second and third floor windows.

5 The bell tower*, at the top of the staircase, houses a copy of the clock bell installed in 1369 for the first time on a civil building.

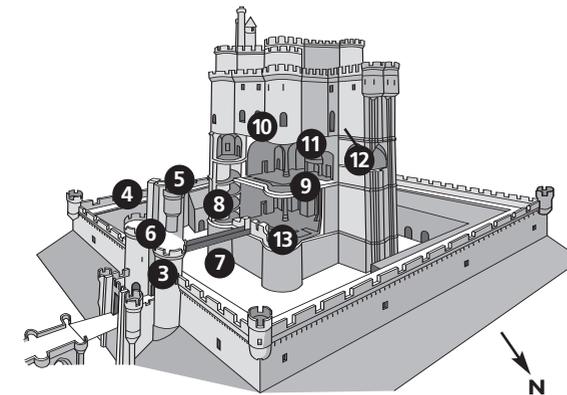
6 The study is located on the second floor of the chatelet: Charles V used to work and receive visitors in this room, assisted by two secretaries in the two adjoining turrets.

7 The chemin-de-ronde was not covered during the Middle Ages. The king used it to walk from his study to his apartment on the first floor of a building in the courtyard.

This building is no longer standing, but the mouldings of its openings can be seen in the courtyard side wall.

- 8 The footbridge** was the only way into the keep in the Middle Ages.

9 The council room, which nowadays shows a film recounting the history of the castle in Charles V's time, was originally used as a venue for official receptions and working meetings between the monarch and his advisors. If necessary, it was used as a bedroom for the queen or the king's friends and relatives. The archways in this room still bear the panelling* that also covered the walls in the 14th century. Note the sculpted decor in the room, repeated from the ground floor to the third floor: a capital at the top of the central column, consoles featuring evangelist symbols in the corners, and the prophets in the middle of the walls. The south-east turret is taken up by a wide and ample **staircase**: this redesign, desired by the king, leads to the second floor of his quarters.



- 10 The bedchamber**, in the central room on the second floor, has a beautiful fireplace. The king used to put away his finest manuscripts in a chest placed in the west window recess. The patterns

painted on the ribs of the vaulting hint at the exquisite interior decoration of the only medieval royal residence still in its original layout.

- 11 The oratory** extends into the chapel, located in the north-east turret.

12 The treasure room, in the north-west turret, was where sacks of gold and Charles V's finest pieces of gold and silver work were deposited. It leads to the latrine and to the oriel* study, built after the second floor was completed.

13 The ground floor houses an original well. The central hall was divided by a canted wall in the Middle Ages. The keep's prison past, borne out from the 16th century, is presented at this level.

14 The Holy Chapel

Founded by Charles V in 1379, the chapel is modelled on the Sainte-Chapelle* of the Palais de la Cité in Paris, though it has only one floor, with oratories reserved for the queen on the right and the king on the left, and to the north east a building containing the sacristy and treasure room.

The work initiated during the reign of Charles V was continued under Charles VI and completed long afterwards under Henry II (1547-1559). The sculptures on the west gate show the skill of the early 15th-century stoneworkers.