

1 La Mère Poulard

Mère Poulard, born Anne Boutiaud in 1851 and nicknamed Annette, was a simple chambermaid without much learning. She nonetheless became an astute businesswoman thanks to a very simple idea. She arrived in Mont-Saint-Michel in the service of Edouard Corroyer, Head Architect with the Historic Monuments Office in charge of restoring the abbey. She married Victor Poulard, the baker's son, and the young couple then took over the Hostellerie de la Tête d'Or. At the time there were no crowds... Visitors were still dependent on the tides as the causeway had not yet been built; it was finished in 1879. They would arrive when the tides permitted, at any time of night or day, so it was important to feed them quickly, as soon as they entered the town. Annette's brainwave was to serve them a tasty omelette while they waited, and this was to make the young cook famous. La Mère Poulard was born!

The Porte du Roi and the Hôtel Poulard Aimé. Postcard



2 Houses in the village

The 15th century wooden house named la Sirène (the Mermaid), located at the start of the Main Street, is one of the village's oldest houses. At the top end of the 15th century village you will also find the Maison de l'Artichaut, (House of the Artichoke), formerly the Hôtellerie de la Lycorne (the Unicorn Hostelry), the Maison du Four Banal (House of the Communal Oven) and the Maison de la Truie qui File (House of the Spinning Sow). The village's history has always been linked to that of the Abbey. The very first shops were set up to sell souvenirs or rent lodgings to the pilgrims.

Maison de l'Artichaut (House of the Artichoke)



Restoring Mont-Saint-Michel to a maritime setting The Mount's new approach

The dam, a unique viewpoint over the Mount

The dam on the River Couesnon started operation in May 2009 and, by regulating the water flow, gives the river sufficient force to push sediment out to sea beyond the Mount. In addition to its hydraulic function, the dam blends in with the new approach route to the Mont-Saint-Michel as a work of art and a structure to welcome the public.

It is keeping with the project's philosophy to enhance the site in the best way, offering visitors the possibility of reaching the village and the Abbey while discovering the area. The dam is permanently* open to the public, visit leaflets are available from the Tourist Information Centre on the car park.

* (Open 24/7 except when maintenance work is in progress).



3 Ruelle des Cocus (Cuckold's Alley)

You will not find a street name sign at the entrance to this alleyway since no road on the Mount has one. Instead, everyone takes their bearings from the names of the houses or their decorative details. This alley with a steep flight of stairs provides a sheltered passageway in the heart of the village. It is called the Ruelle des Cocus (Cuckold's Alley) due to its extreme narrowness, as a husband or wife wearing the cuckold's «horns» would be unable to pass through. If you mount the steps in the alley leading from Grande Rue, you will reach the village's cemetery. Other passageways, such as the Escalier des Monteux, lead to superb views over the bay and the abbey.



4 Hidden gardens

Mont-Saint-Michel often brings to mind a narrow street filled with shops and visitors. However, if you move away from the main street by climbing the steps leading away from it, you will discover some remarkable panoramas and small secluded gardens.



5 A walk round the ramparts

Dating mainly from the 15th century, the ramparts were built above all to protect the mount and its abbey against the English during the Hundred Years War. The rampart walk offers a fine vista over the bay and Tombelaine Island and an opportunity to savour the sea air, particularly at very high tide, before reaching the abbey.

6 The Abbey cloister: the dragon and floral designs

The cloister shelters a garden recreated in 1966 by Brother Bruno de Senneville, a monk and fervent botanist. The sculptures in the galleries feature 13th century carvings of a stylised and symbolic garden, evoking the richness of creation. A dragon has been sculpted next to Christ, the Virgin Mary and saint Francis, reminding us that however beautiful the world, evil is always present.



Perfectly integrated into the banks of the River Couesnon, the dam acts as an interface between the mainland and the bay, between land and sea elements.

The elements engraved in bronze - alphabets, shells and coats of arms - are all references to the history of Mont-Saint-Michel and the Bay, discretely integrated into the structure.

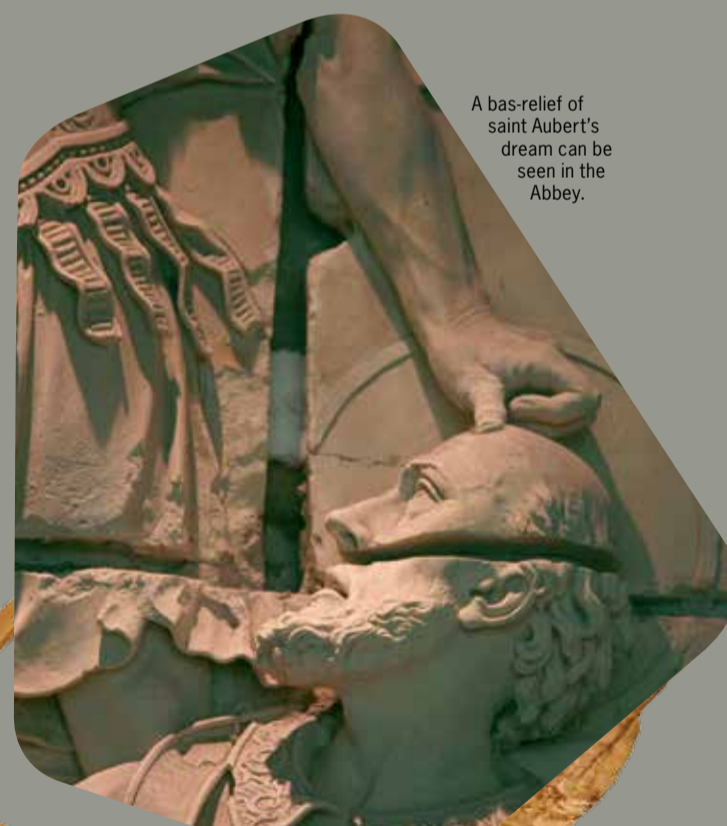
The new access structure

The design of the new access structure, completed in 2014, offers visitors an entirely new approach to the site. A dyke section (1,187 yards long), slightly set off to the East, leads to a walkway bridge at the end of the path (831 yards). This gives the walkway a renewed maritime feeling, and a ford (131 yards) then leads to the village year-round, except for several hours a year when the tidal coefficients are exceptionally higher than 110. The Mount then becomes an island, set in the middle of its original backdrop.



7 Saint Aubert, the Bishop of Avranches

The story goes that the archangel appeared to the bishop in a dream and asked him to build a sanctuary on the Mount. As Aubert doubted his vision, saint Michael repeated the visitation with increasing persistence, going as far as piercing a hole in Aubert's obstinate skull with his finger!



A bas-relief of saint Aubert's dream can be seen in the Abbey.

8 Saint Michael the Archangel

Reaching towards the skies from the pinnacle of the abbey church spire with the slain dragon at his feet, saint Michael the archangel is leader of the heavenly hosts. As guardian and protector of the Catholic Church, he weighs souls during the Last Judgement and accompanies the souls of the Chosen Ones to the gates of Paradise.



The Wonder of the Mount

The Beacon of Christianity

The Wonder of the West

The Heavenly Jerusalem

The Pyramid of the seas

An abbey between earth, sea and sky

Mont-Saint-Michel stands in a bay with remarkable landscapes and ecosystems. The site has been honoured with double UNESCO World Heritage status since 1979. Mont-Saint-Michel is a municipality. The abbey and ramparts are owned by the French state.

From the first sanctuary to the «Wonder»

Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, built the first sanctuary in 708 at Archangel Michael's bidding when he appeared to him in a vision while asleep. The Romanesque abbey was built three centuries later in the 11th century. In order to meet the geographical constraints of the rocky outcrop, architects were forced to innovate by designing a system of terraced crypts on which the future buildings would rest. The church took the shape of a simple Latin cross at the summit of the mount. Living quarters such as dormitories, refectories, common rooms and the chaplaincy were arranged around it. In the 13th century a fire destroyed the abbey and the village. Philippe Auguste, King of France, decided to fully fund a Gothic-style reconstruction. Much more than just a renovation, it was an extension including buildings to the North, which were called "the Wonder" by pilgrims who marvelled at the beauty of the place.

A protected and protective fortress

Because of its strategic position, Mont-Saint-Michel rapidly acquired defensive military architecture. The site was given battlements, fortifications and portcullises in the 14th century. During the Hundred Years War, the monks defended the abbey against the English invader so valiantly that at the end of the conflict it was given the title of «the Impregnable Fortress» and became a symbol of resistance.

The prison on the Mount

Louis XI was the first, in the 15th century, to turn part of the abbey into a prison. A true natural prison, the Mount was given the name of «Bastille of the seas» in the 18th century. 14,000 prisoners were held there between 1793 and 1863, when the prison was finally closed.

Visits of the Abbey can be arranged to suit all ages and tastes.
Mont-Saint-Michel Abbey/Centre des monuments nationaux: 02 33 89 80 00.
Website: www.mont-saint-michel.monuments-nationaux.fr

Mont-Saint-Michel at night Mount in a different light...

Discovering the abbey by night

When night has fallen, Mont-Saint-Michel Abbey lifts the veil on its history and mysterious secrets. The building is engulfed in light, images, acoustic effects and music. In a setting infused with serenity, the audience embarks on some surprising and unusual discoveries. In a true journey through time, suspended between dream and reality, spectators follow the story of a unique monument.

July/August: every evening except Sunday. From 7pm to midnight, last tickets sold at 11pm.
The Abbey's evening programme of cultural and themed events includes: concerts and spring tide evenings.

The City of books

The Gate to Heaven

From the Mount to the bay



Crossing the bay

Every year a large number of pilgrims and walkers cross the bay to reach Mont-Saint-Michel. It is essential to explore the bay with a professional guide in order to fully appreciate its beauty and fragility.

Tangue

Around the Mount, the layer of tangue which covers the seabed varies between 10 and 20 metres in depth. This fine sandy marine sediment began to accumulate in the bay 6,500 years ago.

Life on the foreshore

At each low tide the retreating sea reveals a foreshore covering nearly 25,000 hectares made up of tangué (the local name for a grey, sandy, silty, sediment rich in sea shell debris). The bay's foreshore, in particular the mudflats and the criches, (salt marsh drainage channels) is a veritable nursery for many species. From primary production (micro-algae) to top-level predators (some species of fish, birds and marine mammals), the soundness of the food chain is proof of a healthy environment.

Life in the salt marshes

Above the shoreline grows vegetation that thrives in a salty environment: saltbush, samphire and cord-grass grow in the salt meadows, also called salt marshes, where sheep are put out to pasture. Directly linked to the length of immersion time, the distribution of salt marsh flora reflects the height of sediment. At the lowest level, pioneer plants such as samphire and cord-grass gradually colonise the mudflats. A little higher up, alkali grass, saltwort and saltbush prosper. At the highest level of the salt marshes, where the sea rarely penetrates, grasses such as fescue, bentgrass and European beachgrass dominate.

Saltbush lambs feed in the bay's salt marshes. They can cover up to 15 kilometres a day. Since 2009 they are covered by a Protected Designation of Origin.

The polders

Looking landwards, building of embankments, reclamation and drainage work undertaken since the 19th century has won back tracts of land from the sea for agricultural use. 3,000 hectares, almost entirely cultivated, are covered with geometric plots criss-crossed by dykes lined with poplar trees.

Birds from all over the world

Mont-Saint-Michel Bay is a wetland area of great significance for water birds, not only as wintering grounds but also as a staging area during migration. Every year in mid-January over 100,000 birds take refuge there. Not only ducks and shorebirds but also seagulls and herons find abundant food and resting areas in the bay.

Tide and tidal bore

The sea surges into Mont-Saint-Michel Bay twice a day. It flows out as far as 15 kilometres from the coast during spring tides. This unceasing movement of the tides has shaped the landscape. The tidal bore, an exceptional natural phenomenon, can be over 50 cm high as it travels up the rivers Sélune, Sée and Couesnon.

Tourist Information Centre

The Tourist Information Centre is located in the car park, near the shuttle departure point at the crossroads of the approach paths to Mont-Saint-Michel. Please don't hesitate to stop by for any information you may require for your visit to Mont-Saint-Michel. Staff are also at your disposal to provide information about things to see and do in Mont-Saint-Michel Bay, as well as in Brittany and Normandy.

The Tourist Information Centre is open every day (except for 25 December and 1 January).

Syndicat Mixte Baie du Mont-Saint-Michel
16 route de la Caserne, 50170 Beauvoir
02 33 89 01 01
Website: www.projetmontsaintmichel.com

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Discovering the Mount



LA BAIE RÉINVENTE LE MONT

