

Medieval France and the Romance of Fontainebleau

3rd –9th October 2023



Day 1: 3 October 2023 Paris

Meet at Paris Gare du Nord this afternoon. Those who have booked the Eurostar with Temple World will depart from St Pancras at 09:31 and arrive in Paris at 12:47 local time. If you have not already met Dr Rowena Archer on the journey she will introduce herself at the Gare du Nord!

Start your medieval exploration right away as there are two essential places in Paris to visit before boarding the barge, the **Sainte Chapelle** and the **Conciergerie**, both on the Île de la Cité, the oldest part of the city. Your baggage will be stored securely on board our coach while you sightsee.

Commissioned in the 13th century by Louis IX, the royal chapel of Sainte Chapelle was built to house the King's collection of relics of the Passion of Christ. Built in a flamboyant Gothic style for use by the King and castle staff rather than the general public, its interior is staggeringly beautiful, with incomparable stained glass windows which were lucky to escape destruction during the French Revolution.

Continue to the Conciergerie, less visited than Sainte Chapelle but even more fascinating. Originally built in the 6th century as a residence for the first King of France (Clovis), the current structure dates back to 1200 and today it is a rare example of secular Gothic architecture, perhaps the best example in Europe. Used as a royal palace until the 14th century, it was then turned into a seat of parliament, with one of its stately towers converted into a much-feared prison later infamous for housing Marie Antoinette whilst awaiting her fate at the guillotine.

After the visit the group will be transferred to hotel barge *MS Deborah*, which will be moored on the banks of the Seine. After everyone has settled into their cabins, the crew will introduce themselves to you before enjoying a welcome drink followed by dinner. The barge will cruise through Paris to take in the City of Light at night (water levels permitting).

Overnight: MS [Deborah](#) | Meals: **D**

Day 2: 4 October 2023 Paris to Evry

Spend the morning cruising on the Seine towards Evry, enjoying a wonderful view of the monuments along the river, with lunch served along the way.

Reaching **Evry** in the early afternoon, disembark to visit to the sumptuous Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte. The architect Louis Le Vau was already widely celebrated when Nicolas Fouquet, Superintendent of Finance to Louis XIV, called on his services in 1653 to build a grand mansion for himself in Evry.

Considered the greatest ambassador of the Italianate style in France, Le Vau drew inspiration from classical antiquity but created a powerful new style of his own, starting with Vaux-le-Vicomte – and thus lay the foundations of French architecture for the next 150 years. Vaux-le-Vicomte's garden is the seminal expression of the *Jardin à la française*, the French aesthetic of formal gardens that swept Europe in the 17th century. Nicolas Fouquet gave full rein to renowned landscape gardener André Le Nôtre who used the latest technical, scientific and artistic knowledge of his era.

Once the chateau was finished, Fouquet threw a lavish party for the king at Vaux-le-Vicomte. Reportedly outraged by the extravagance, Louis later had him arrested—by none other than the musketeer d'Artagnan—and put on trial for embezzlement and treason. In fact, Louis had decided well before the party to order his minister's arrest, and some historians posit that Fouquet, far from having embezzled millions, had bankrupted himself to save the crown from financial collapse. Fouquet's trial lasted three years and was of significant public interest at the time, during which time the estate was seized by the crown, including all its treasures. Fouquet was banished from France and was never able to live in the chateau.

After the tour, return to the hotel barge for dinner and overnight on board.

Overnight: MS [Deborah](#) | Meals: **D**

Day 3: 5 October 2023 Evry to Melun

After breakfast, disembark the barge and travel by coach to enjoy a guided visit to the **Château de Dourdan**. Built in the 13th century to defend the southern part of the royal estate, it is a unique example of a medieval fortress with all the key architectural features characteristic of this time still present.

Continue to the pretty town of **Étampes**, a stronghold in medieval times which today still preserves several structures from those times, including several beautiful medieval churches.

Professor Archer will decide which ones to visit, but we may see the Église Saint-Martin, known for its leaning tower, the Église Saint-Basile d'Étampes, used as a hospital during the French Revolution, or the Collegiate Church of Notre Dame-du-Fort, which was fortified in the early 13th century so rather unusually features crenelated parapets. A three course lunch is included at a café in Étampes.

Continue by coach to the quaint village of **Barbizon**. Once a base for the kings of France when hunting in the nearby Fontainebleau forest, in the 19th century a group of painters discovered the rural beauty of the Barbizon landscapes, which inspired a new school of painting dedicated to realism and painting 'in situ' rather than from a studio. Field workers and peasants were frequently depicted in the paintings, against backgrounds of open land.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Theodore Rousseau, Jean-Francois Millet, and Charles-Francis Daubigny were among the leaders of the movement. Van Gogh was a fan of the school and imitated the style in his own paintings. In the latter part of the 19th century, a second generation of artists from the Impressionist era, including Monet, Renoir, and Alfred Sisley, painted in Barbizon.

After free time to stroll through the cobbled streets and perhaps visit a few small galleries, the group will return to the hotel barge which will be moored in Melun, for dinner and overnight on board.

Overnight: MS [Deborah](#) | Meals: **B, L, D**

Day 4: 6 October 2023 Melun to Moret-sur-Loing

Spend a relaxing morning cruising towards Moret-sur-Loing, with lunch on board. In the afternoon, disembark to explore the UNESCO World Heritage listed **Palace of Fontainebleau** and its magnificent gardens. Associated with many key events in French history, the Italianate Palace of Fontainebleau was the site of the repeal of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 168, and the abdication of the Emperor Napoleon I in 1814.

Started in 1528 to expand an earlier medieval hunting castle which had been beloved of Louis IX (of which the former keep is still visible), King François I (contemporary and rival of England's Henry VIII) intended Fontainebleau to be a 'new Rome'.

To bring his ambitious idea to fruition he invited several Italian architects, artists and sculptors to contribute new ideas, notably Rosso Fiorentino and Primaticcio. Fontainebleau's cutting-edge architecture and décor in turn influenced many French artists to transform their own practices and is no exaggeration to say that it influenced the evolution of art across Europe.

The château is unique in having been inhabited continually for more than eight centuries, and successive kings and queens of France have each left their mark on the architecture of the palace during their tenure. Having become the Imperial palace after the Revolution, Fontainebleau also bears the mark of the renovations by Napoleon I and is home to the only Napoleonic Throne room still in existence.

There will also be time to visit the cosmopolitan town which sprung up around the château, before returning to the barge for dinner and overnight on board.

Overnight: MS [Deborah](#) | Meals: [B](#), [L](#), [D](#)

Day 5: 7 October 2023 Moret-sur-Loing to Montereau-Fault-Yonne

This morning after breakfast, those who wish to, may join Dr Archer on a walk into the charming medieval village of **Moret-sur-Loing**, around 15-20 minutes on foot from where the barge is moored. Those who prefer can ask the barge crew to call a taxi if preferred (taxi at own expense). There is time to stroll around the town, where the British impressionist painter Alfred Sisley lived until his death in 1899, to see the two medieval gates, the centuries-old timber-framed houses and the gothic church of Notre Dame de la Nativite, consecrated by Thomas Becket.

Return to the barge and spend the rest of the morning cruising towards Montereau-Fault-Yonne, with lunch on board.

In the afternoon, disembark for a guided visit of the picture-perfect medieval town of **Provins**, UNESCO World Heritage listed for its exceptional number of listed monuments, including medieval fortified ramparts and towers, keeps and tithe barns, and sumptuous 13th-century homes and wooden façades. Meander through the towering gates down cobblestone streets, past half-timbered buildings once inhabited by local wool merchants. Religious highlights include the Romanesque Saint-Quiriac Collegiate Church, said to have been visited by Joan of Arc in 1429,

and the Saint-Ayoul Priory, founded in the 11th century for Benedictine monks, serving as an important centre of religious and cultural life in the region.

For those whose interest has been piqued by all the sites seen on this tour, you might like to pop into *Le Roi Lire*, a bookshop housed in an underground vaulted room which specialises in the Middle Ages. And if you have a sweet tooth, duck into a pâtisserie and see if you can pick up a niflette, a small puff pastry tart filled with pastry cream flavoured with orange-water, and a celebrated Provins delicacy.

Provins has also been famous for hundreds of years for its cultivation of the highly scented *Rosa gallica* 'officinalis' (Provins rose) and in the 16th century the main street of Provins was dominated by apothecary shops and vendors selling scented sachets or medicinal syrups, skin lotions, jams and sweets made from rose water and rose oil. To honour this heritage, at the end of the tour today, enjoy a tasting of one of Provins' most beloved rose products: **rose honey**.

Afterwards, return to the barge moored in Montereau-Fault-Yonne for a leisurely evening, with dinner and overnight on board.

Overnight: MS [Deborah](#) | Meals: **B, L, D**

Day 6: 8 October 2023 Montereau-Fault-Yonne to Sens

Spend the morning cruising the Yonne River, a peaceful tributary of the Seine, passing by several lakes. Arrive in pretty **Sens** in the afternoon, located at the confluence of the Yonne and known as the gateway to Burgundy.

A major centre of the early French Christian church during the Carolingian Empire, its archbishop was the head of seven dioceses including Paris and Orleans.

The cathedral in Sens is considered the first to be built in the Gothic style in France and its choir was the inspiration in layout and design for many others in Europe, including that of Canterbury Cathedral. The vaulting over the nave and choir were revolutionary for the time. The stained windows span the periods from the Early Gothic to the Renaissance, with the most notable being the St Thomas Becket window in the choir aisle, dating to the early 13th century. Next to the cathedral is the town's museum, housed in the former Archbishop's Palace. The exhibits include the Sens Cathedral Treasury, an exceptional collection of religious fabrics, gold and silverware, 15th century Flemish tapestries and the Sainte Châsse, a byzantine casket in intricately carved ivory dating to the 10th or 11th century.

Enjoy a stroll through the maze of streets lined with half-timbered houses and mansions, including one dating back to the 16th century with the tree of Jesse carved on one of its pillars, tracing the genealogy of Christ. The town often features picturesque floral displays and boasts a particularly lovely 15 hectare garden, the Moulin à Tan Park.

After the tour, return to the barge. Tonight the group will enjoy a final gala dinner on board.

Overnight: MS Deborah | Meals: *B, L, D*

Day 7: 9 October 2023 Sens to Paris

Enjoy a final breakfast on board before disembarking. Transfer by coach to Paris Gare du Nord, with a stop enroute to enjoy a Cremant tasting at the cellars of Bailly-Lapierre. The village of Bailly is the birthplace of the AOC Crémant de Bourgogne. The tour ends on arrival at the Gare du Nord, around 13:30.

Those who are not extending their holiday in Paris are now free to make their way home.

If you have booked Temple World's recommended Eurostar train back to London, check in for the return journey departing at 15:13.