



Around Paris

Paris is encircled by the Île de France, the 12,000-sq-km 'Island of France' shaped by five rivers: the Epte in the northwest, the Aisne (northeast), the Eure (southwest), the Yonne (southeast) and the Marne (east). The region was the 'seed' from which the kingdom of France grew, from about AD 1100. Today, excellent rail and road links between the French capital and the sights of this region and neighbouring *départements* make it popular with day trippers.

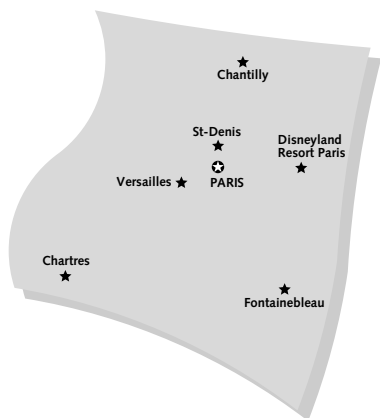
The Île de France boasts some of the nation's most beautiful and ambitious cathedrals. Close to Paris is St-Denis, the last resting place for France's kings until the Revolution. Senlis has a magnificent Gothic cathedral said to have inspired the mother of all basilicas, the cathedral at Chartres, with its breathtaking stained glass and intricately carved stone portals.

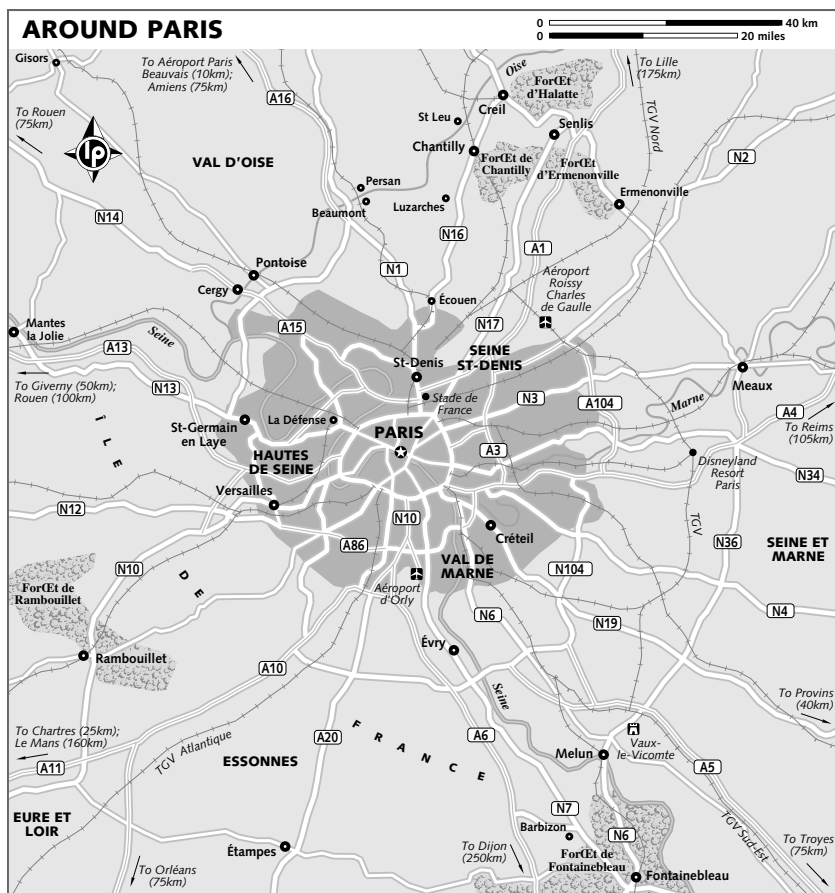
The region also counts some of the nation's most extravagant châteaux. Foremost is the palace at Versailles, whose opulence was partly what spurred the Revolutionary mob to storm the Bastille in July 1789. The château at Fontainebleau is one of the most important Renaissance palaces in France, while the one at Chantilly is celebrated for its gardens and artwork.

But the Île de France is not stuck in the past. The modern cityscape of La Défense, just west of the city, stands in contrast to the Paris of legend and the imagination. And then there's every kid's favourite, Disneyland Resort Paris, which now has more attractions than ever.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admire what is Europe's most important collection of funerary sculpture in the crypt of the **Basilique de St-Denis** (p208)
- Get behind the scenes – literally – at **Walt Disney Studios Park** (p210)
- Relive the glory that was the kingdom of France in the 17th and 18th centuries at the **Château de Versailles** (p211)
- Go for a walk, a cycle or even a climb at the Île de France's loveliest wood, the **Forêt de Fontainebleau** (p216)
- Wonder at the colour and richness of the 15th-century *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* illuminated manuscript at the **Château de Chantilly** (p217)
- Get bluer than blue or look at the world through rose-coloured glass under one of the awesome stained-glass windows at the **Cathédrale Notre Dame de Chartres** (p220)





Orientation & Information

Espace du Tourisme d'Île de France (Map pp126-7; ☎ 01 44 50 19 98; www.pidf.com; Galerie du Carrousel du Louvre, 99 rue de Rivoli, 1er; **M** Palais Royal-Musée du Louvre; ☎ 10am-6pm) is in the lower level of the Carrousel du Louvre shopping (p140) centre next to IM Pei's inverted glass pyramid.

MAPS

If you're visiting the area under your own steam, pick up a copy of Michelin's new 1:200,000-scale *Île de France* regional map (€6.60) or IGN's more compact 1:100,000-scale *Paris et Ses Environs* (€4.90), both available from the **Espace IGN** (p953) just off the av des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

LA DÉFENSE

pop 20,000

The ultramodern architecture of La Défense, Paris' skyscraper district on the Seine 3km west of the 17e arrondissement, is so strikingly different from the rest of centuries-old Paris that it's worth a brief visit to put it all in perspective. When development of the 750-hectare site began in the late 1950s, it was one of the world's most ambitious civil-engineering projects. Its first major structure was the vaulted, largely triangular **Centre des Nouvelles Industries et Technologies** (CNIT; Centre for New Industries and Technologies), a giant 'pregnant oyster' inaugurated in 1958, extensively rebuilt 30 years later and revamped as

a shopping centre in 2008. Like many of its contemporaries, the centre now feels tired. But later generations still excite: including the **Cœur Défense** (Défense Heart; 2001), the **Tour EDF** (2001) and the **Tour T1** (2005).

Today La Défense counts more than 100 buildings, is home to three-quarters of France's 20 largest corporations and showcases extraordinary monumental art. A total of 1500 companies of all sizes employ some 150,000 people, transforming the oversized, nocturnal ghost town into a hive of high-flying commercial activity.

Information

CIC Courbevoie La Défense bank (11 place de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the Espace Info-Défense.

Espace Info-Défense (☎ 01 47 74 84 24; www.la-defense.fr; 15 place de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; ☎ 9am-5.15pm Mon-Fri) La Défense's tourist office has reams of free information, including the useful *Discover La Défense* brochure, and details on cultural activities.

Post Office (CNIT Bldg, ground fl, 2 place de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche)

Sights

GRANDE ARCHE DE LA DÉFENSE

The most important sight is the remarkable cube-shaped **Grande Arche** (Great Arch; ☎ 01 49 07 27 27; www.grandearche.com; 1 parvis de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; adult/6-17yr/under 6yr €9/7.50/free, family €19-22; ☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Mar). Housing government and business offices, it is made of white Carrara marble, grey granite and glass, and measures exactly 110m along each side. Inaugurated on 14 July 1989, the arch marks the western end of the 8km-long **Axe Historique** (Historic Axis) stretching from the Louvre's glass pyramid. Lifts enclosed in glass will whisk you up to the 35th floor for views, a film, scale models and a well-received restaurant without (!) a view.

MUSÉE DE LA DÉFENSE

Below the Espace Info-Défense, the **Musée de la Défense** (La Défense Museum; ☎ 01 47 74 84 24; www.ladefense.fr; 15 place de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; admission free; ☎ 9am-5.15pm Mon-Fri) traces the development of La Défense through the decades with drawings, architectural plans and scale models. Especially interesting are the projects that were never built, including the Tour sans Fin, a 'Never-Ending Tower' that would have been 425m high, but just 39m in diameter.

LIGHT BUILDING

Sky-high future architectural creations at La Défense throw caution to the wind, but outranking them all in size, beauty and sustainability will be **Tour Phare** (Lighthouse Tower), a 299m-tall office and retail tower that torques like a human torso and, through awnings that raise and lower when the sun hits them, uses light as a building material. It is scheduled for completion in 2012.

GARDENS & MONUMENTS

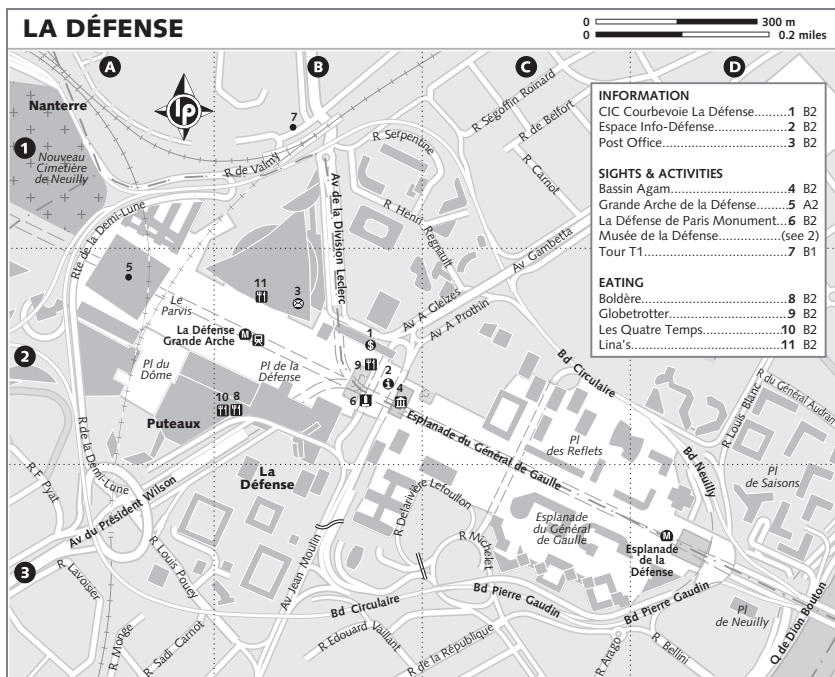
Le Parvis, place de la Défense and Esplanade du Général de Gaulle, which together form a pleasant, 1km-long pedestrian walkway, comprise a **garden of contemporary art**. The more than 60 monumental sculptures and murals along the **Voie des Sculptures** (Sculpture Way) here include colourful and imaginative works by Calder, Miró, César and Torricini, among others.

In the southeastern corner of place de la Défense and opposite the Info-Défense office is a much older monument – **La Défense de Paris**, which commemorates the defence of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and from which the district's name is derived. Behind is the **Bassin Agam**, a pool with mosaics and fountains.

Eating

La Défense is mostly fast-food territory. The 3rd floor of the shopping centre **Les Quatre Temps** (☎ 01 47 73 54 44; www.les4temps.com, in French; 15 parvis de la Défense; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-10pm Sat) is loaded with places to eat quick, be it pizza or pancakes, Häagen-Dazs ice cream, Starbucks coffee, soup and juice or stylish Japanese. There's also a convenient branch of the sandwich shop **Lina's** (☎ 01 56 37 04 30; www.linascfe.fr; parvis de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; sandwiches €3.90-6.90, soups & salads €4.50-6.10; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

Globetrotter (☎ 01 55 91 96 96; 16 place de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; starters €8-23, mains €15-30; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) This attractive restaurant next to the tourist office has a tropical theme and attempts to take diners on a culinary tour of the world's islands. Tables on the wooden decking terrace face La Grande Arche and those inside woo diners with first-row seats at the Bassin Agam (above).



Boldère (☎ 01 47 73 54 44; 15 parvis de la Défense; **M** La Défense Grande Arche; salads €8-15; ☎ 9am-1am Mon-Fri) The hottest address on the block, this *bar à légumes* (vegetable café) on the 3rd floor of Les Quatre Temps has health-conscious punters building salads from 101 different ingredients or supping one of four different homemade soups. Interior decor is contemporary, the mood chic-casual and the cuisine 100% vegetarian.

Getting There & Away

La Défense Grande Arche metro station is the western terminus of metro line 1; the ride from the Louvre takes about 15 minutes. If you take the faster RER line A, remember that La Défense is in zone 3 and you must pay a supplement (€1.95) if you are carrying a travel pass for zones 1 and 2 only. Beware: the area is patrolled regularly by inspectors.

ST-DENIS

pop 138,600

For 1200 years St-Denis was the burial place of French royalty; today it is a suburb with a very mixed population just north of Paris'

18e arrondissement. The ornate royal tombs, adorned with some truly remarkable statuary, and the Basilique de St-Denis containing them are well worth the trip north, as is the Stade de France, the futuristic stadium just south of Canal de St-Denis.

Information

Office de Tourisme de St-Denis Plaine Commune

(☎ 01 55 87 08 70; www.saint-denis-tourisme.com; 1 rue de la République; **M** Basilique de St-Denis; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Sun Apr-Sep)

Post Office (59 rue de la République; **M** Basilique de St-Denis)

Société Générale bank (11 place Jean Jaurès; **M** Basilique de St-Denis; ☎ 8.45am-1pm & 2-5.15pm Mon-Fri, 8.45am-12.45pm Sat)

Sights

BASILIQUE DE ST-DENIS

Serving as the burial place for all but a handful of France's kings and queens from Dagobert I (r 629-39) to Louis XVIII (r 1814-24), the **Basilique de St-Denis** (St Denis Basilica; ☎ 01 48 09 83 54; www.monuments-nationaux.fr; 1 rue de la Légion d'Honneur;

M Basilique de St-Denis; basilica admission free, tombs adult/senior, student & 18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free, admission free 1st Sun of month Nov-Mar; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Oct-Mar) and its tombs and mausoleums constitute one of Europe's most important collections of funerary sculpture.

The single-towered basilica, begun around 1136, was the first major structure to be built in the Gothic style and served as a model for many other 12th-century French cathedrals, including the one at Chartres (p220). Features illustrating the transition from Romanesque to Gothic can be seen in the **choir** and the **ambulatory**, which are adorned with a number of 12th-century **stained-glass windows**.

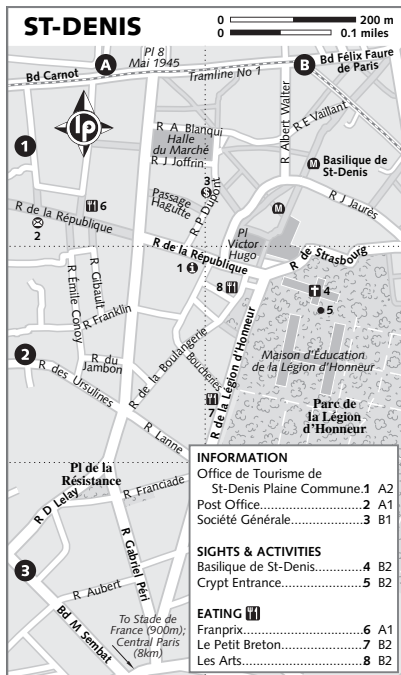
During the Revolution and the ensuing Reign of Terror the basilica was devastated; skeletal remains from the royal tombs were dumped into two pits outside the church. The mausoleums were put into storage in Paris, however, and survived. They were brought back in 1816, and the royal bones were re-buried in the crypt a year later. Restoration of the structure was initially begun under Napoléon Bonaparte, but most of the work was carried out by the Gothic Revivalist architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc from 1858 until his death in 1879.

The **tombs** are decorated with life-size figures of the deceased. Those built before the Renaissance are adorned with *gisants* (recumbent figures). Those made after 1285 were carved from death masks and are thus fairly, er, lifelike; the 14 figures commissioned under Louis IX (St Louis; r 1214-70) are depictions of how earlier rulers may have looked. The oldest tombs (from around 1230) are those of **Clovis I** (d 511) and his son **Childbert I** (d 558). Don't miss the white-marble catafalque tomb (1597) of **Louis XII** and **Anne of Bretagne**. The graffiti etched on the arms of the seated figures dates from the early 17th century.

Self-paced 1¼-hour audioguide tours of the basilica and the tombs cost €4 (€6.50 for two sharing).

STADE DE FRANCE

Just south of central St-Denis, the 80,000-seat **Stade de France** (Stadium of France; ☎ 08 92 70 09 00; www.stadefrance.com; rue Francis de Pressensé, ZAC du Cornillon Nord, 93216 St-Denis La Plaine; **M** St-Denis-Porte de Paris; adult/student & 6-11yr/under 6yr €10/8/free, family €29; ☎ tours in French on the hr 10am-5pm Apr-Aug, 4 to 5 daily Sep-Mar, in English 10.30am & 2.30pm Apr-Aug) was



built in time for the 1998 World Cup, which France won by miraculously defeating favourite Brazil 3-0. The futuristic and quite beautiful structure, with a roof the size of place de la Concorde, is now used for football and rugby matches, major gymnastic events and big-ticket music concerts. Visits by guided tour only.

Eating

Les Arts (☎ 01 42 43 22 40; 6 rue de la Boulangerie; **M** Basilique de St-Denis; starters €6-7, mains €11-18, menu €18; ☎ lunch & dinner to 10.30pm Tue-Sun) This central restaurant has mostly Maghrib cuisine (couscous, *tajines* 'Moroccan stews' etc) though a few traditional French dishes as well, and comes recommended by local people.

Le Petit Breton (☎ 01 48 20 11 58; 18 rue de la Légion d'Honneur; **M** St-Denis-Porte de Paris; menus €11 & €14; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-3.30pm Sat) 'The Little Breton' is a decent spot for a lunch of traditional French fare; don't expect galettes (buckwheat pancakes) or crêpes, despite the name. The plat du jour is a bargain-basement €8.

There is a **Franprix supermarket** (34 rue de la République; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon, 8.30am-8pm Tue-Sat,

HEADS UP

The basilica is named in honour of St Denis, the patron saint of France (also known as Dionysius of Paris), who introduced Christianity to the city and was beheaded by the Romans in Montmartre for his pains. Legend has it that he then walked with his head under his arm to the very spot where the basilica was subsequently built. You can see a likeness of him – carrying his unfortunate head – on the carved western portal of Notre Dame Cathedral (p145) in Paris.

8.30am-1.30pm Sun) in the centre of town by the post office.

Getting There & Away

You can reach St-Denis in 20 minutes by metro line 13: take it to Basilique de St-Denis station for the basilica and tourist office, and to St-Denis-Porte de Paris station for the Stade de France. (The latter can also be reached via RER line B; alight at La Plaine-Stade de France station.) Make sure to board a metro heading for St-Denis Université and *not* for Gabriel Péri Asnières-Gennevilliers-Courtilles, as the line splits at La Fourche station.

DISNEYLAND RESORT PARIS

Disneyland Resort Paris, 32km east of Paris, consists of three main areas (plus a golf course): **Disney Village**, with its seven hotels, shops, restaurants and clubs; **Disneyland Park**, with its five theme parks; and **Walt Disney Studios Park**, which brings film, animation and TV production to life. The first two are separated by the RER and TGV train stations; the studios neighbour Disneyland Park. Moving walkways whisk visitors to the sights from the far-flung car park.

Disneyland has been on something of a roller coaster financially since it opened in the middle of sugar-beet fields in 1992. Judging from the crowds, however, many visitors – mostly families with young children – can't seem to get enough.

Information

Espace du Tourisme d'Île de France et de Seine et Marne (☎ 01 60 43 33 33; www.pdf.com; place François Truffaut, 77705 Chessy; ☎ 9am-8.45pm) The Île de France tourist office branch northwest of the resort shares space with an office dispensing information on the *département* of Seine et Marne.

Sights

One-day admission fees at **Disneyland Resort Paris** (☎ 01 60 30 60 30; www.disneylandparis.com; adult/3-11yr/under 3yr €46/38/free) include unlimited access to all rides and activities in *either* Walt Disney Studios Park or Disneyland Park. Multiple-day passes are available, including a **Passe-Partout** (adult/3-11yr/under 3yr €56/48/free), which allows entry to both parks for one day, and the two-/three-day **Hopper Ticket** (adult €103/128, 3-11yr €84/105) with which you can enter and leave both parks as often as you like over nonconsecutive days used within one year. Admission fees change from season to season, and a multitude of special offers and accommodation/transport packages are always available.

Disneyland Park (☎ 9am-11pm daily mid-Jul–Aug, 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun Sep-Mar, 9am-8pm daily Apr–early May, 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun early May–mid-Jun, 9am-8pm daily mid-Jun–early Jul) is divided into five *pays* (lands). **Main Street, USA**, just inside the main entrance, is a spotless avenue reminiscent of Norman Rockwell's idealised small-town America c 1910, complete with Disney characters let loose among the crowds. Adjoining **Frontierland** is a recreation of the 'rugged, untamed American West' with the legendary Big Thunder Mountain ride. **Adventureland**, meant to evoke the Arabian Nights and the wilds of Africa (among other exotic lands portrayed in Disney films), is home to that old favourite, Pirates of the Caribbean, as well as Indiana Jones and the Temple of Peril, a roller coaster that spirals through 360 degrees – in reverse. **Fantasyland** brings fairy-tale characters such as Sleeping Beauty, Pinocchio, Peter Pan and Snow White to life; you'll also find 'It's a Small World' here. **Discoveryland** features a dozen high-tech attractions and rides, including Space Mountain: Mission 2, Star Tours and the Toy Story 2–inspired Buzz Lightyear Laser Blast.

Walt Disney Studios Park (adult/3-11yr/under 3yr €46/38/free; ☎ 9am-6pm daily Jul-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar, 10am-6pm daily Apr-Jun) has a sound stage, a production backlot and animation studios, which help illustrate up close how films, TV programs and cartoons are produced.

Eating

You are not allowed to picnic on resort grounds but there's an ample number of

themed restaurants to choose from, be it **Buzz Lightyear's Pizza Planet** (Discoveryland); **Planet Hollywood** or the *Happy Days*-inspired **Annette's Diner** (Disney Village); the meaty **Silver Spur Steakhouse** or Mexican **Fuente del Oro** (Frontierland); and the seafaring **Blue Lagoon** restaurant (Adventureland) for future pirates. Most have *menus* (fixed-price menus) for children (around €10) and adults (€20 to €30). Opening hours vary. To avoid another queue, pick your place online and reserve a table in advance (☎ 01 60 30 40 50).

Getting There & Away

Marne-la-Vallée/Chessy, Disneyland's RER station, is served by line A4; trains run every 15 minutes or so from central Paris (€7.50; including park admission adult/ages three to 11 €47/39; 35 to 40 minutes). The last train back to Paris leaves just after midnight.

VERSAILLES

pop 87,100

The prosperous, leafy and very bourgeois suburb of Versailles, 21km southwest of Paris, is the site of the grandest and most famous château in France. It served as the kingdom's political capital and the seat of the royal court for more than a century, from 1682 to 1789 – the year Revolutionary mobs massacred the palace guard and dragged Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette back to Paris, where they eventually had their heads separated from their shoulders.

Many people consider Versailles a must-see destination. The best way to avoid the queues is to arrive first thing in the morning; if you're interested in just the Grands Appartements, another good time to get here is about 3.30pm or 4pm. The queues are longest on Tuesday, when many of Paris' museums are closed, as well as on Sunday. Most importantly, buy your château ticket in advance: online (www.chateauversailles.fr), from a branch of Fnac or at any SNCF train station or office.

Information

Office de Tourisme de Versailles (☎ 01 39 24 88 88; www.versailles-tourisme.com; 2bis av de Paris; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon, 9am–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Sep, 9am–6pm Tue–Sat, 9am–6pm Sun Oct–Mar) Sells the Passeport (p213) to Château de Versailles, a detailed visitors guide (€8.50) and a useful IGN walking map of the area (€9.50).
Post Office (av de Paris)

Sights

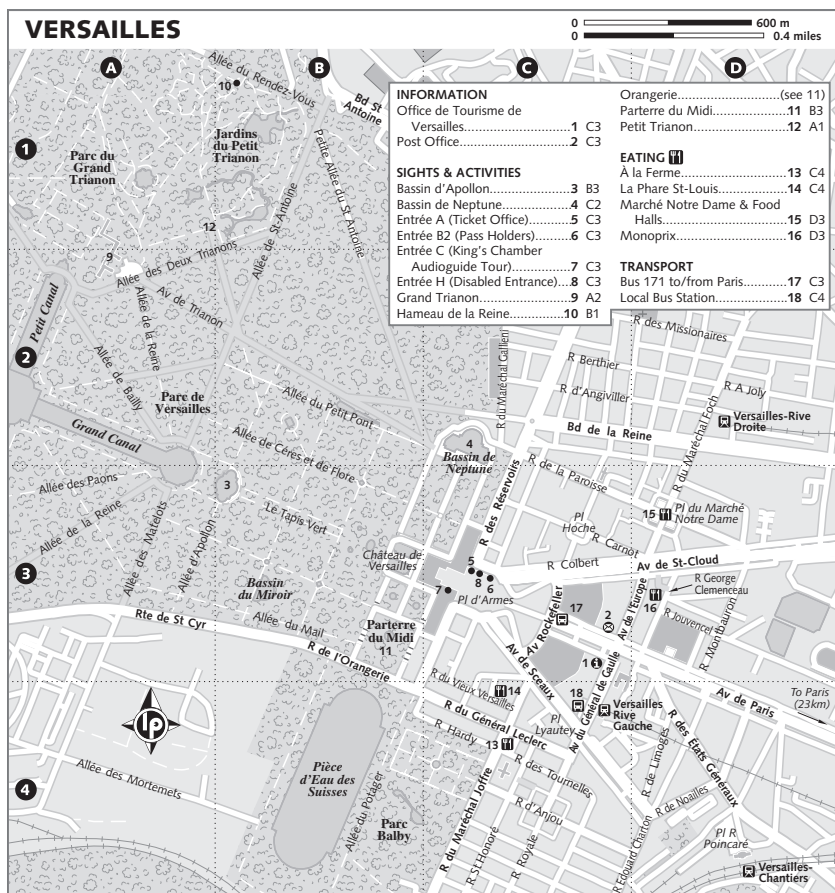
CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

The splendid and enormous **Château de Versailles** (Versailles Palace; ☎ 08 10 81 16 14; www.chateauversailles.fr; adult/under 18yr €13.50/free, from 3pm €10/free; ☎ 9am–6.30pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, to 5.30pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar) was built in the mid-17th century during the reign of Louis XIV – the Roi Soleil (Sun King) – to project the absolute power of the French monarchy, which was then at the height of its glory. Its scale and decor also reflect Louis XIV's taste for profligate luxury and his boundless appetite for self-glorification. Some 30,000 workers and soldiers toiled on the structure, the bills for which all but emptied the kingdom's coffers. The château has undergone relatively few alterations since its construction, though almost all the interior furnishings disappeared during the Revolution and many of the rooms were rebuilt by Louis-Philippe (r 1830–48). The current €370 million restoration program is the most ambitious yet and until it's completed in 2020 at least a part of the palace is likely to be clad in scaffolding when you visit.

About two decades into his long reign (1643–1715), Louis XIV decided to enlarge the hunting lodge his father had built at Versailles and turn it into a palace big enough for the entire court, which numbered about 6000 people at the time. To accomplish this he hired three supremely talented men: the architect Louis Le Vau (Jules Hardouin-Mansart took over from Le Vau in the mid-1670s); the painter and interior designer Charles Le Brun; and the landscape artist André Le Nôtre, whose workers flattened hills, drained marshes and relocated forests as they laid out the seemingly endless gardens, ponds and fountains.

VERSAILLES IN FIGURES

The château at Versailles counts 700 rooms, 2153 windows, 352 chimneys and 67 staircases under 11 hectares of roof set on 800 hectares of garden, park and woods, including 200,000 trees and 210,000 flowers newly planted each year. There are 50 fountains and 620 fountain nozzles. The walls and rooms are adorned with 6300 paintings, 2100 sculptures and statues, 15,000 engravings and 5000 decorative art objects and furnishings. Oh, and 7.5 million annual visitors, 4.7 million of whom make it inside.



Le Brun and his hundreds of artisans decorated every moulding, cornice, ceiling and door of the interior with the most luxurious and ostentatious of appointments: frescos, marble, gilt and woodcarvings, many with themes and symbols drawn from Greek and Roman mythology. The King's Suite of the **Grands Appartements du Roi et de la Reine** (King's and Queen's State Apartments), for example, includes rooms dedicated to Hercules, Venus, Diana, Mars and Mercury. The opulence reaches its peak in the recently restored **Galerie des Glaces** (Hall of Mirrors), a 75m-long ballroom with 17 huge mirrors on one side and, on the other, an equal number of windows looking out over the gardens and the setting sun.

The château complex comprises four main sections: the palace building, a 580m-long structure with multiple wings, grand halls and sumptuous bedchambers and the Grands Appartements du Roi et de la Reine; the vast gardens, canals and pools to the west of the palace; two much smaller palaces (outbuildings almost!), the **Grand Trianon** and, a few hundred metres to the east, the **Petit Trianon**; and the **Hameau de la Reine** (Queen's Hamlet).

The basic palace ticket includes an English-language audioguide and allows visitors to freely visit the palace's state apartments, the chapel, the **Appartements du Dauphin et de la Dauphine** (Dauphin's and Dauphine's Apartments) and various galleries. The

so-called **Passeport** (adult/under 18yr €20/free Tue-Fri, €25/free Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, €16/free Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) includes the same as well as the Grand Trianon and, in high season, the Grandes Eaux Musicales fountain displays (see below). Enter the palace through Entrée A with a palace ticket; Entrée C with a Passeport.

The section of the vast **château gardens** (☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, 8am-6pm Nov-Mar) nearest the palace, laid out between 1661 and 1700 in the formal French style, is famed for its geometrically aligned terraces, flowerbeds, tree-lined paths, ponds and fountains. The 400-odd statues of marble, bronze and lead were made by the most talented sculptors of the era. The English-style **Jardins du Petit Trianon** are more pastoral and have meandering, sheltered paths. Admission to the gardens is free, except on weekends during the Grandes Eaux Musicales (see below), between April and October.

The **Grand Canal**, 1.6km long and 62m wide, is oriented to reflect the setting sun. It is traversed by the 1km-long **Petit Canal**, creating a cross-shaped body of water with a perimeter of more than 5.5km. Louis XIV used to hold boating parties here. In season, you too can paddle around the Grand Canal in four-person **rowing boats**; the dock is at the canal's eastern end. The **Orangerie**, built under the **Parterre du Midi** (Southern Flowerbed) on the southwestern side of the palace, shelters tropical plants in winter.

The gardens' largest fountains are the 17th-century **Bassin de Neptune** (Neptune's Fountain), a dazzling mirage of 99 spouting gushers 300m north of the palace, and the **Bassin d'Apollon** (Apollo's Fountain) at the eastern end of the Grand Canal. The straight side of the Bassin de Neptune abuts a small round pond graced by a winged dragon. Emerging from the water in the centre of the Bassin d'Apollon is Apollo's chariot, pulled by rearing horses.

Try to time your visit for the **Grandes Eaux Musicales** (adult/student & 11-18yr/under 11yr €7/5.50/free, admission free after 4.50pm; ☎ 11am-noon & 3.30-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep) or the after-dark **Grandes Eaux Nocturnes** (adult/11-18yr/under 10yr €7/5.50/free; ☎ 9.30-11.30pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug), truly magical 'dancing water' displays set to music composed by baroque- and classical-era composers throughout the grounds in summer.

In the middle of the vast 90-hectare park, about 1.5km northwest of the main palace,

is what is now known as **Domaine de Marie-Antoinette** (Marie-Antoinette's Estate; adult/adult after 5pm/under 18yr €9/5/free Apr-Oct, €5/free/free Nov-Mar; ☎ noon-6.30pm daily Apr-Oct, noon-5.30pm daily Nov-Mar). The pink-colonnaded **Grand Trianon** was built in 1687 for Louis XIV and his family as a place of escape from the rigid etiquette of the court. Napoléon I had it redone in the Empire style. The much smaller, ochre-coloured **Petit Trianon**, built in the 1760s, was redecorated in 1867 by Empress Eugénie, the consort of Napoléon III, who added Louis XVI-style furnishings similar to the uninspiring pieces that now fill its 1st-floor rooms. Further north is the **Hameau de la Reine**, a mock village of thatched cottages constructed from 1775 to 1784 for the amusement of Marie-Antoinette, who liked to play milkmaid here.

Be advised that high-season tickets cover admission to the Grand Trianon, the Hameau de la Reine, Marie-Antoinette's dairy, the theatre, the English garden and so on; low-season tickets only cover the Grand Trianon and Petit Trianon gardens, which notably are both free on the 1st Sunday of the month between November and March.

Tickets to several different **guided tours** (☎ 08 10 81 16 14; adult with/without palace ticket, Passeport or ticket to the Domaine de Marie-Antoinette €7.50/14.50, under 18yr €5.50; ☎ 9.45am-3.45pm Tue-Sun) addressing different themes – life at court, classical music, 'Versailles splendours', the private apartments of Louis XV and Louis XI and so on – are sold at the main ticket office. Some are conducted in English.

Eating

Rue Satory is lined with restaurants serving cuisines from all over the world, including Indian, Chinese, Lebanese, Tunisian and Japanese.

our pick À la Ferme (☎ 01 39 53 10 81; 3 rue du Maréchal Joffre; starters/mains €6/14, menus €17.50 & €21.80; ☎ lunch & dinner to 11pm Wed-Sun) Cowhide seats and rustic garlands strung from old wood beams add a country air to 'At the Farm', a temple to grilled meats and cuisine from southwest France.

Le Phare St-Louis (☎ 01 39 53 40 12; 33 rue du Vieux Versailles; menus €11-16; ☎ lunch & dinner to 11pm) This cosy Breton place heaves. Pick from 15 savoury galettes (€6.70 to €8) and 40-odd different sweet crêpes, including the

Vieux Versailles (€5.60) topped with redcurrant jelly, pear and ice cream then set ablaze with Grand Marnier.

If headed from the tourist office for the outdoor **Marché Notre Dame** (place du Marché Notre Dame; ☎ 7.30am-2pm Tue, Fri & Sun) food market, enter via passage Saladin at 33 av de St-Cloud. There are also **food halls** (☎ 7am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sat) surrounding the marketplace. **Monoprix** (9 rue Georges Clemenceau; ☎ 8.30am-8.55pm Mon-Sat) department store, north of av de Paris, has a large supermarket section.

Getting There & Away

RATP bus 171 (€1.50 or one metro/bus ticket, 35 minutes) links Pont de Sèvres (15e) in Paris with the place d'Armes every six to nine minutes from 5am to midnight.

RER line C5 (€2.80) goes from Paris' Left Bank RER stations to Versailles-Rive Gauche station, which is only 700m southeast of the château and close to the tourist office. Trains run every 15 minutes until shortly before midnight.

Less convenient, RER line C8 links Paris' Left Bank with Versailles-Chantiers station, a 1.3km walk from the château.

SNCF operates up to 70 trains a day from Paris' Gare St-Lazare (€2.80) to Versailles-Rive Droite, which is 1.2km from the château. The last train to Paris leaves just after midnight. Versailles-Chantiers is served by half-hourly SNCF trains daily from Gare Montparnasse (€2.80); trains on this line continue to Chartres (€10.90, 45 to 60 minutes). An SNCF package (*forfait loisir*) covering the Paris metro, return train journey to/from Versailles and château admission costs €19.20.

FONTAINEBLEAU

pop 15,900

The town of Fontainebleau, 67km southeast of Paris, is renowned for its elegant Renaissance château, one of France's largest royal residences. It's much less crowded and pressured than Versailles. The town itself has a number of fine restaurants, swish cafés and cultural happenings, and is surrounded by the beautiful Forêt de Fontainebleau, a favourite hunting ground of many French kings and today an important recreational centre in the Île de France. Fontainebleau's lifeblood is INSEAD (www.insead.edu), the international graduate business school that brings some 2000 students here each year.

Information

Office de Tourisme de Pays de Fontainebleau

(☎ 01 60 74 99 99; www.fontainebleau-tourisme.com; 4 rue Royale; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Nov-Mar) The tourist office hires out bicycles (per hour/half-day/full day €5/15/19), as well as self-paced English-language audioguide tours (€4.60, 1½ hours) of both the palace and the Forêt de Fontainebleau.

Post Office (2 rue de la Chancellerie)

Sights

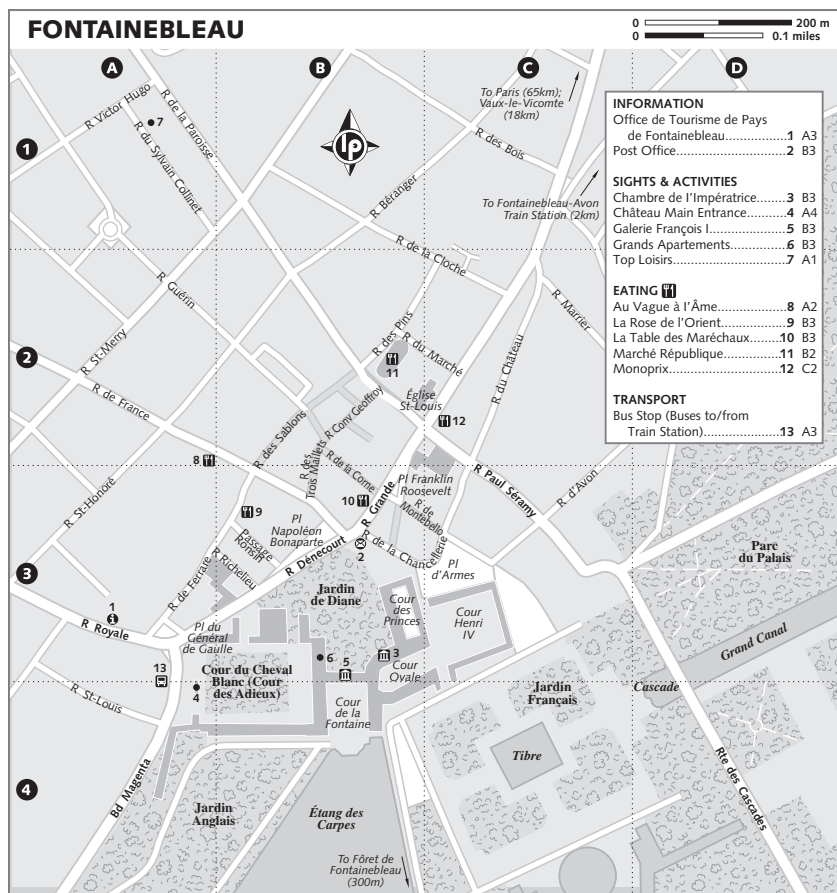
CHÂTEAU DE FONTAINEBLEAU

The enormous, 1900-room **Château de Fontainebleau** (Fontainebleau Palace; ☎ 01 60 71 50 70; www.musee-chateau-fontainebleau.fr, in French, www.chateaudefontainebleau.net; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €8/6/free, admission free 1st Sun of month; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Jun-Sep, to 5pm Wed-Mon Oct-May), whose list of former tenants or visitors reads like a who's who of French royalty, is one of the most beautifully decorated and furnished châteaux in France. Every centimetre of wall and ceiling space is richly adorned with wood paneling, gilded carvings, frescos, tapestries and paintings. The parquet floors are of the finest woods, the fireplaces are ornamented with exceptional carvings, and many pieces of the furniture date back to the Renaissance era.

The first château on this site was built some time in the early 12th century and enlarged by Louis IX a century later. Only a single medieval tower survived the energetic Renaissance-style reconstruction undertaken by François I (r 1515-47), whose superb artisans, many of them brought from Italy, blended Italian and French styles to create what is known as the First School of Fontainebleau. The *Mona Lisa* once hung here amid other fine works of art in the royal collection.

During the latter half of the 16th century, the château was further expanded by Henri II (r 1547-59), Catherine de Médicis and Henri IV (r 1589-1610), whose Flemish and French artists created the Second School of Fontainebleau. Even Louis XIV got in on the act: it was he who hired Le Nôtre to redesign the gardens.

Fontainebleau, which was not damaged during the Revolution (though its furniture was stolen or destroyed), was beloved by Napoléon, who had a fair bit of restoration work carried out. Napoléon III was another frequent visitor. During WWII the château



was turned into a German headquarters. After it was liberated by Allied forces under US General George Patton in 1944, part of the complex served as the Allied and then NATO headquarters from 1945 to 1965.

Visits take in the **Grands Appartements** (State Apartments), which contain several outstanding rooms. An informative 1½-hour audioguide (included in the price) leads visitors around the main areas.

The spectacular **Chapelle de la Trinité** (Trinity Chapel), whose ornamentation dates from the first half of the 17th century, is where Louis XV married Marie Leczinska in 1725 and where the future Napoléon III was christened in 1810. **Galerie François 1er**, a jewel of Renaissance architecture, was decorated from 1533 to

1540 by Il Rosso, a Florentine follower of Michelangelo. In the wood panelling, François I's monogram appears repeatedly along with his emblem, a dragon-like salamander.

The **Salle de Bal**, a 30m-long ballroom dating from the mid-16th century that was also used for receptions and banquets, is renowned for its mythological frescos, marquetry floor and coffered ceiling. The large windows afford views of the Cour Ovale (p216) and the gardens. The gilded bed in the 17th- and 18th-century **Chambre de l'Impératrice** (Empress' Bedroom) was never actually used by Marie-Antoinette, for whom it was built in 1787. The gilding in the **Salle du Trône** (Throne Room), the royal bedroom before the Napoléonic period, is in three colours: gold, green and yellow.

A 1¼-hour **guided tour** (adult/18-25yr €12.50/11; ☎ 10.30am & 3.30pm daily) takes visitors through the **Petits Appartements**, the private rooms of the emperor and empress, and the **Musée Napoléon 1er**, which contains personal effects (ornamental swords, hats, uniforms, coats etc) and bric-a-brac that belonged to Napoléon and his relatives. Another tour of the same length and costing the same amount visits the **Musée Chinois de l'Impératrice Eugénie** (☎ 11.30am & 2.30pm daily), a set of four drawing rooms created for the Empress Eugénie, Napoléon III's wife, in 1863 to house her collection of oriental art. Sign up for both tours (€19/16) and you get into the main part of the château for free.

As successive monarchs added their own wings to the château, five irregularly shaped courtyards were created. The oldest and most interesting is the **Cour Ovale** (Oval Courtyard), no longer oval but U-shaped due to Henri IV's construction work. It incorporates the keep, the sole remnant of the medieval château. The largest courtyard is the **Cour du Cheval Blanc** (Courtyard of the White Horse), from where you enter the château. Napoléon, about to be exiled to Elba in 1814, bade farewell to his guards from the magnificent 17th-century **double-horseshoe staircase** here. For that reason the courtyard is also called the **Cour des Adieux** (Farewell Courtyard).

The **château gardens** (admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, to 6pm Mar, Apr & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb) are quite extraordinary. On the northern side of the château is the **Jardin de Diane**, a formal garden created by Catherine de Médicis. Le Nôtre's formal, 17th-century **Jardin Français** (French Garden), also known as the Grand Parterre, is east of the **Cour de la Fontaine** (Fountain Courtyard) and the **Étang des Carpes** (Carp Pond). The **Grand Canal** was excavated in 1609 and pre-dates the canals at Versailles by more than half a century. The informal **Jardin Anglais** (English Garden), laid out in 1812, is west of the pond.

FORÊT DE FONTAINEBLEAU

Beginning 500m south of the château and surrounds the town, the 20,000-hectare **Forêt de Fontainebleau** (Fontainebleau Forest) is one of the prettiest woods in the region. The many trails – including parts of the **GR1** and **GR11** (for further details, see p944) – are excellent for jogging, walking, cycling and horse riding. The area is covered by IGN's

1:25,000-scale *Forêt de Fontainebleau* map (number 2417OT; €9.70). The tourist office sells the *Guide des Sentiers de Promenades dans le Massif Forestier de Fontainebleau* (€12), whose maps and text (in French) cover 19 forest walks. Bookshops in town sell the *À Pied en Famille – Autour de Fontainebleau* (FFRP), which maps 18 family walks from 2.5km to 5km long.

Rock-climbing enthusiasts have long come to the forest's sandstone ridges, rich in cliffs and overhangs, to hone their skills before setting off for the Alps. The area presents a whole range of difficulties, so anyone from beginners to expert climbers will find their feet. There are different grades marked by colours, starting with white ones, which are suitable for children, and going up to death-defying black boulders.

The **Bleau website** (<http://bleau.info>) has stacks of information in English on climbing in Fontainebleau. Two gorges worth visiting are the Gorges d'Apremont, 7km northwest near Barbizon, and the Gorges de Franchard, a few kilometres south of Gorges d'Apremont. If you want to give it a go, contact **Top Loisirs** (☎ 01 60 74 08 50; www.toploisirs.fr, in French; 16 rue Sylvain Collinet) about equipment hire and instruction. The tourist office (p214) also sells the comprehensive *Fontainebleau Climbs* (€25), in English.

Eating

La Rose de l'Orient (☎ 06 08 88 36 49; 20 rue de Ferrare; meze from €1, sandwiches €4, grills €7.50; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Tue-Sat) This Lebanese eatery is the spot for a fast cheap lunch courtesy of two sisters. Five plastic tables inside or take away a picnic of meze and pitta bread.

our pick Au Vague à l'Âme (☎ 01 60 72 10 32; 39 rue de France; galettes & crêpes €2.50-9.50, lunch menus €11.50-16, dinner menus €25; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner to 1am Tue-Sat) This cheerful café-restaurant with a vague nautical theme is the place for Breton specialities, including mussels, fresh oysters and an oyster terrine to die for.

La Table des Maréchaux (☎ 01 60 39 55 50; 9 rue Grande; starters €15-20, mains €23-30, weekday lunch menus €32, dinner menus €40; ☎ lunch & dinner to 11pm) Tucked in fancy Hôtel Napoléon, this romantic restaurant with its flowery interior courtyard garden is a must in summer. Cuisine is inventive: traditional French inspired by foreign flavours and exotic spices.

Options for self-caterers include the following:

Marché République (rue des Pins; ☎ 8am-1pm Tue, Fri & Sun) Fontainebleau's covered food market, north of the central pedestrian area.

Monoprix (58 rue Grande; ☎ 8.45am-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Supermarket section on the 1st floor.

Getting There & Around

Up to 30 daily SNCF commuter trains link Paris' Gare de Lyon hourly with Fontainebleau-Avon station (€7.60, 40 to 60 minutes); the last train returning to Paris leaves Fontainebleau a bit after 9.45pm weekdays, just after 10pm on Saturday and sometime after 10.30pm on Sunday. An SNCF package (adult/10 to 17 years/4 to 9 years €23/16.70/8.10) includes return transport from Paris, bus transfers and château admission.

Local bus line A links the train station with the château (€1.50), which is 2km southwest, every 10 minutes from 5.30am to 9.30pm. The stop is opposite the main entrance.

Vaux-le-Vicomte

Privately owned **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte** (Vaux-le-Vicomte Palace; ☎ 01 64 14 41 90; www.vaux-le-vicomte.com; adult/6-16yr €12.50/9.90, candlelight visit €15.50/13.70, family €39; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar-early Nov, candlelight visits 8pm-midnight Fri Jul & Aug, Sat May-mid-Oct) and its magnificent **formal gardens** (☎ 10am-6pm late Mar-mid-Nov), 20km north of Fontainebleau and 60km southeast of Paris, were designed and built by Le Brun, Le Vau and Le Nôtre between 1656 and 1661 as a precursor to their more ambitious work at Versailles. On the second and the last Saturday of every month from April to October, there are elaborate **jeux d'eau** (fountain displays) in the gardens from 3pm to 6pm.

The beauty of Vaux-le-Vicomte turned out to be the undoing of its owner, Nicolas Fouquet, Louis XIV's minister of finance. It seems that Louis, seething with jealousy that he had been upstaged at the château's official opening, had Fouquet thrown into prison, where the unfortunate *ministre* died in 1680.

Today visitors swoon over the château's beautifully furnished interior, including its fabulous dome. In the vaulted cellars an exhibition looks at Le Nôtre's landscaping of the formal **gardens**. A collection of 18th- and 19th-century carriages in the château stables,

included in the château admission, forms the **Musée des Équipages** (Carriage Museum).

Getting There & Away

Vaux-le-Vicomte is not an easy place to get to by public transport. The château is 6km northeast of Melun, which is served by RER line D2 from Paris (€7, 45 minutes). A shuttle bus (€3.50 each way) links Melun station with the château shuttle three to five times daily at weekends from April to October; at other times you'll have to take a **taxi** (☎ 01 64 52 51 50), which will cost about €20.

CHANTILLY

pop 11,000

The elegant old town of Chantilly, 48km north of Paris, is small, select and spoiled. Its château sits in a sea of parkland, gardens, lakes and the Forêt de Chantilly, which is packed with walking opportunities; its racetrack is one of the most prestigious hat-and-frock addresses in Europe; and that deliciously sweetened thick *crème* called Chantilly was created here (see the boxed text, p219). Whatever you do, don't come on Tuesday, when the imposing but heavily restored château is closed.

Information

Office de Tourisme de Chantilly (☎ 03 44 67 37 37; www.chantilly-tourisme.com; 60 av du Maréchal Joffre; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun May-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) Ample information on Chantilly, including accommodation lists and a trio of *promenades* leaflets outlining walks through town, along Chantilly's two canals and around the racecourse.

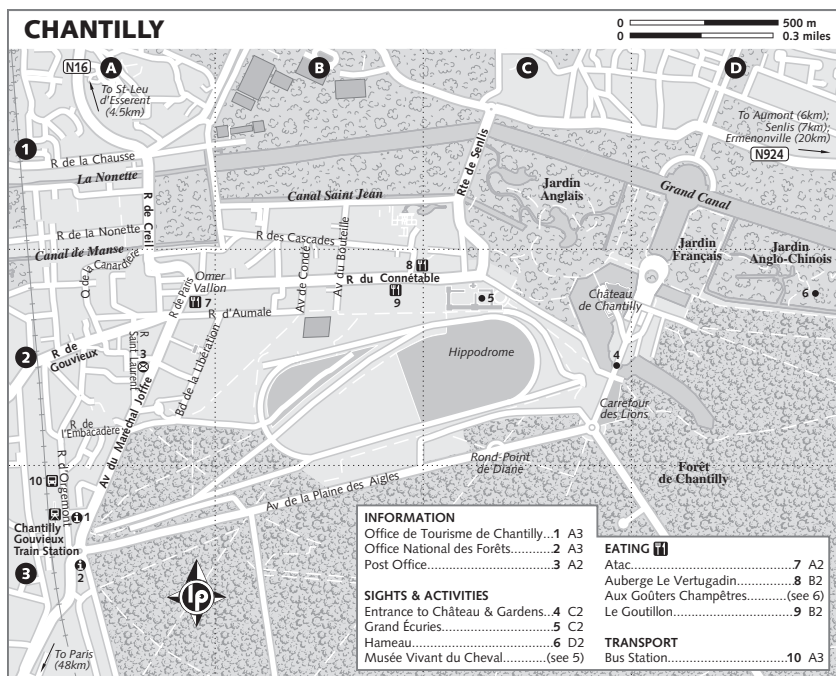
Post Office (26 av du Maréchal Joffre)

Sights

CHÂTEAU DE CHANTILLY

Left in a shambles after the Revolution, the **Château de Chantilly** (Chantilly Palace; ☎ 03 44 27 31 80; www.chateaudechantilly.com; adult/under 18yr €10/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, 10.30am-5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Feb) is of interest mainly because of its gardens and the number of superb paintings it contains. It consists of two attached buildings, which are entered through the same vestibule.

The **Petit Château**, built around 1560 for Anne de Montmorency (1492-1567), who served six French kings as *connétable* (high constable), diplomat and warrior and died doing battle with Protestants in the Counter-



Reformation, contains the **Appartements des Princes** (Princes' Suites). The highlight here is the **Cabinet des Livres**, a repository of 700 manuscripts and more than 30,000 volumes, including a Gutenberg Bible and a facsimile of the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, an illuminated manuscript dating from the 15th century that illustrates the calendar year for both the peasantry and the nobility. The **chapel**, to the left as you walk into the vestibule, has woodwork and stained-glass windows dating from the mid-16th century and was assembled by the duke in 1882.

The attached Renaissance-style **Grand Château** was rebuilt 100 years after the Revolution by the Duke of Aumale, son of King Louis-Philippe, and served as a French military headquarters during WWI. It contains the **Musée Condé**, a series of unremarkable 19th-century rooms adorned with paintings and sculptures haphazardly arranged according to the whims of the duke, who donated the château to the Institut de France on the condition that the exhibits not be reorganised and that they remain open to the general public. The most remarkable works are hidden away

in a small room called the **Sanctuaire**, including paintings by Raffaello, Filippino Lippi and Jean Fouquet.

The château's excellent gardens were once among the most spectacular in France. The formal **Jardin Français** (French Garden), with flowerbeds, lakes and a **Grand Canal** laid out by Le Nôtre in the mid-17th century, is northeast of the main building. To the west, the 'wilder' **Jardin Anglais** (English Garden) was begun in 1817. East of the Jardin Français is the rustic **Jardin Anglo-Chinois** (Anglo-Chinese Garden), created in the 1770s. Its foliage and silted-up waterways surround the **hameau**, a mock village dating from 1774 whose mill and half-timbered buildings inspired the Hameau de la Reine at Versailles. *Crème Chantilly* was born here (see the boxed text, opposite).

A normal ticket allows entry to the château, the Musée Condé and the park, though you can visit just the **park and gardens** (adult/under 18yr €5/free; Ⓜ 10am-6pm Wed-Mon). Combination tickets, available April to November, include the château, the museum, the park and a boat or minitrain ride through the park (adult/4 to 17 years €14/3) and the château, the museum,

the park, a boat or minitrain ride (€19/6). A ticket covering just the park and a ride costs €10/3.

The château's **Grandes Écuries** (Grand Stables), built between 1719 and 1740 to house 240 horses and more than 400 hounds, stand apart from the château to the west and close to Chantilly's famous **hippodrome** (racecourse), inaugurated in 1834. Today the stables house the **Musée Vivant du Cheval** (Living Horse Museum; ☎ 03 44 27 31 80; www.museevivantducheval.fr; adult/12-17yr/4-11yr €9/7/5.50; 🕒 10.30am-6.30pm daily Apr-Oct, 2-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10.30am-6.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), whose 30 pampered equines live in luxurious **wooden stalls** built by Louis-Henri de Bourbon, the seventh Prince de Condé, who was convinced he would be reincarnated as a horse (hence the extraordinary grandeur!). Displays include everything from riding equipment to rocking horses and portraits, drawings and sculptures of famous nags from the past.

Every visitor, big and small, will be mesmerised by the 30-minute **Présentation Équestre Pédagogique** (Introduction to Dressage; 🕒 11.30am, 3.30pm & 5.15pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 11.30am Mon & Wed-Fri, 11.30am, 3.30pm & 5.15pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), which is included in the entry price. Even more magical and highly sought-after are the handful of **equestrian shows** (adult/12-17yr/4-11yr €18.50/14.50/12.50) performed in the stables each year; tickets are like gold dust and can be reserved online.

FORÊT DE CHANTILLY

South of the château is the 6300-hectare **Forêt de Chantilly** (Chantilly Forest), once a royal hunting estate and now criss-crossed by a variety of walking and riding trails. Long-distance trails here include the **GR11**, which links the château with the town of **Senlis** (p220) and its wonderful cathedral; the **GR1**, which

goes from **Luzarches** (famed for its cathedral, parts of which date from the 12th century) to **Ermenonville**; and the **GR12**, which goes north-east from four lakes known as the **Étang de Commelles** to the **Forêt d'Halatte**.

The area is covered by IGN's 1:25,000-scale *Forêts de Chantilly, d'Halatte and d'Ermenonville* map (number 2412OT; €9.80). The 1:100,000-scale *Carte de Découverte des Milieux Naturels et du Patrimoine Bâti* (€6.50), available at the tourist office, indicates sites of interest (eg churches, châteaux, museums and ruins). The **Office National des Forêts** (☎ 03 44 57 03 88; www.onf.fr, in French; 1 av de Sylvie; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), just southeast of the tourist office, publishes a good walking guide for families called *Promenons-Nous dans les Forêts de Picardie: Chantilly, Halatte & Ermenonville* (€7.50), in French.

Eating

Le Goutillon (☎ 03 44 58 01 00; 61 rue du Connétable; starters €8-10, mains €15-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner to 11pm Mon-Sat) With its red-and-white checked tablecloths, simple wooden tables and classic bistro fare, this wine-bar-cum-restaurant is a cosy French affair much loved by local expats. It's as much wine bar as munch hole.

ourpick Auberge Le Vertugadin (☎ 03 44 57 03 19; 44 rue du Connétable; starters €14-38, mains €20-32, menu €28; 🕒 lunch daily, dinner to 11pm Mon-Sat) Old-style and elegant, this ode to regional cuisine – think meat, game and terrines accompanied by sweet onion chutney – fills a white-shuttered town house. A warming fire roars in the hearth in winter, and summer welcomes diners to its walled garden.

Aux Gouters Champêtres (☎ 03 44 57 46 21; Château de Chantilly; menus €19.50-41.50; 🕒 11am-7pm Mar-Nov) This fine restaurant in the windmill of the park's *hameau* has local specialities on the menu and is a wonderful place for lunch, particularly

CHÂTEAU DE WHIPPED CREAM

Like every self-respecting French château three centuries ago, the palace at Chantilly had its own *hameau* (hamlet) complete with *laitier* (dairy), where the lady of the household and her guests could play at being milkmaids, as Marie-Antoinette did at Versailles. But the cows at the Chantilly dairy took their job rather more seriously than their fellow bovines at other faux *crémeries* (dairy shops), and the *crème Chantilly* (sweetened whipped cream) served at the hamlet's teas became the talk (and envy) of aristocratic 18th-century Europe. The future Habsburg emperor Joseph II actually visited this '*temple de marbre*' (marble temple), as he called it, clandestinely to try out the white stuff in 1777. Chantilly (or more properly *crème Chantilly*) is whipped unpasteurised cream with a twist. It's beaten with icing and vanilla sugars to the consistency of a mousse and dolloped on berries. Sample it in any café or restaurant in town.

during the summer. Its chief claim to fame: *crème Chantilly* whipped up for the past 20 years by local chef Jean-Michel Duda.

The large **Atac supermarket** (5 place Omer Vallon; ☎ 9am-6pm) is midway between the train station and the château. Place Omer Vallon is also the location of the twice-weekly **market** (☎ 8.30am-12.30pm Wed & Sat).

Getting There & Away

The château is just over 2km northeast of the train and bus stations; the most direct route from there is to walk along av de la Plaine des Aigles through a section of the Forêt de Chantilly. You will get a better sense of the town, however, by following av du Maréchal Joffre and rue de Paris, so you can connect with rue du Connétable, Chantilly's principal thoroughfare.

Paris' Gare du Nord links with Chantilly-Gouvieux train station (€7, 30 to 45 minutes) by a mixture of RER and SNCF commuter trains (almost 40 a day, 20 on Sunday).

SENLIS

pop 16,500

Senlis, just 10km northeast of Chantilly, is an attractive medieval town of winding cobblestone streets, Gallo-Roman ramparts and towers. It was a royal seat from the time of Clovis to Henri IV and contains four small but fine **museums**, devoted to subjects as diverse as art, archeology, hunting and the French cavalry in North Africa.

The Gothic **Cathédrale de Notre Dame** (place du Parvis Notre Dame; ☎ 8am-6pm) was built between 1150 and 1191. The cathedral is unusually bright, but the stained glass, though original, is unexceptional. The magnificent carved-stone **Grand Portal** (1170), on the western side facing place du Parvis Notre Dame, has statues and a central relief relating to the life of the Virgin Mary. It is believed to have been the inspiration for the portal at the cathedral in Chartres.

The **Office de Tourisme de Senlis** (☎ 03 44 53 06 40; www.senlis-tourisme.fr; place du Parvis Notre Dame; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.15pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm & 2-6.15pm Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Sun Nov-Feb) is just opposite the cathedral.

Getting There & Away

Buses (€3.50, 25 minutes) link Senlis with Chantilly's bus station, just next to its train

station, about every half-hour on weekdays and hourly on Saturday, with about a half-dozen departures on Sunday. The last bus returns to Chantilly at 8pm on weekdays (just after 7pm on Saturday and Sunday).

CHARTRES

pop 42,000

The magnificent 13th-century cathedral of Chartres, crowned by two very different spires – one Gothic, the other Romanesque – rises from rich farmland 88km southwest of Paris and dominates the medieval town around its base. The cathedral's varied collection of relics, particularly the Sainte Voile (see the boxed text, p222), attracted many pilgrims during the Middle Ages, who contributed to the building and extensions of the cathedral. With its astonishing blue stained glass and other treasures, the cathedral at Chartres, France's best-preserved medieval basilica, is a must-see for any visitor.

Information

Atlanteam (☎ 02 37 36 62 15; 13bis rue Jehan de Beauce; per 15/30/60mins €1/2/3.60; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) Internet café.

Office de Tourisme de Chartres (☎ 02 37 18 26 26; www.chartres-tourisme.com; place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2.30-4.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) The tourist office, across the square from the cathedral's main entrance, rents self-paced English-language audioguide tours (for one/two people €5.50/8.50; 1½ hours) of the medieval city and has info on binocular rental, cathedral lectures in English etc.

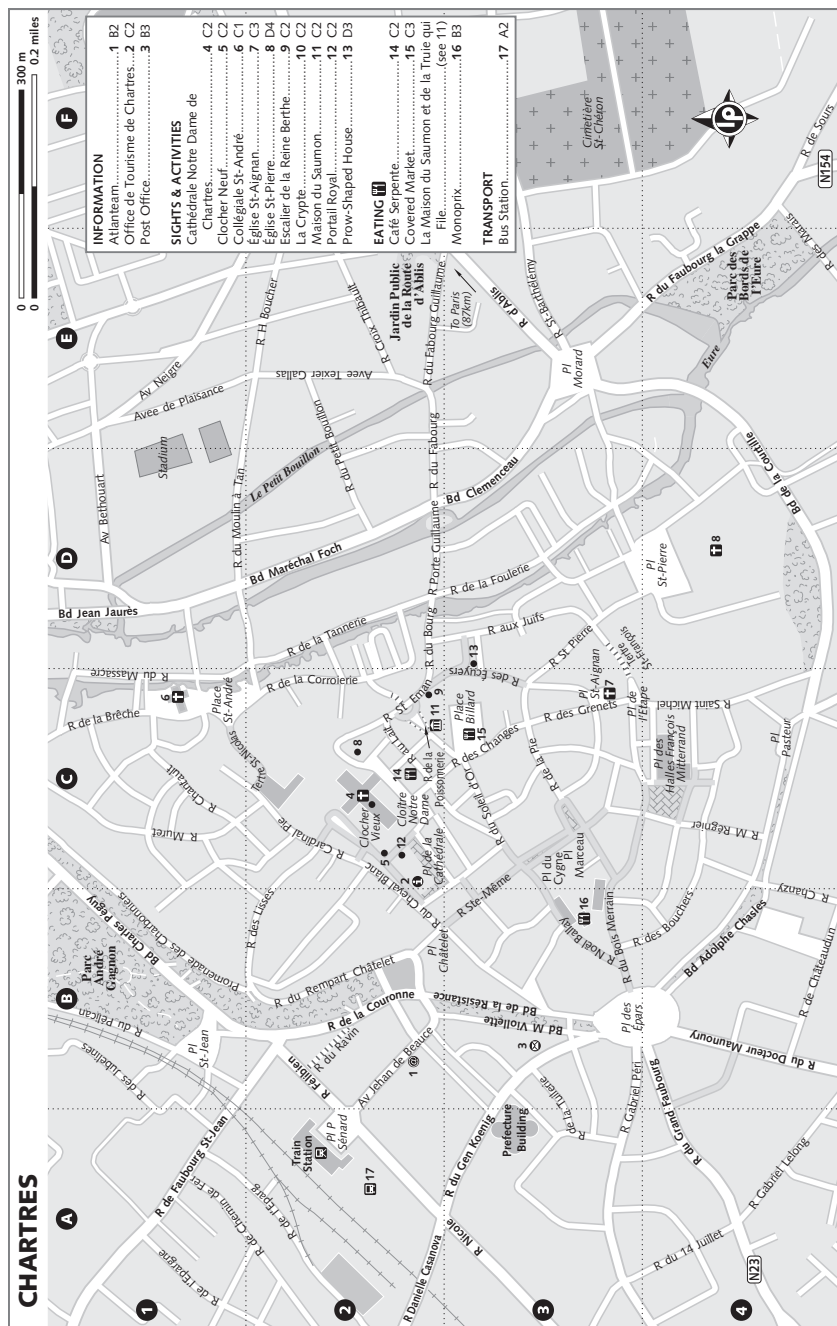
Post Office (3 blvd Maurice Violette)

Sights

CATHÉDRALE NOTRE DAME DE CHARTRES

The 130m-long **Cathédrale Notre Dame de Chartres** (Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres; ☎ 02 37 21 22 07; www.diocese-chartres.com, in French; place de la Cathédrale; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm), one of the crowning architectural achievements of Western civilisation, was built in the Gothic style during the first quarter of the 13th century to replace a Romanesque cathedral that had been devastated – along with much of the town – by fire on the night of 10 June 1194. Because of effective fund-raising and donated labour, construction took only 30 years, resulting in a high degree of architectural unity.

The cathedral's west, north and south entrances have superbly ornamented triple



SACRED COVER-UP

The most venerated object in Chartres cathedral is the Sainte Voile, the 'Holy Veil' said to have been worn by the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to Jesus. It originally formed part of the imperial treasury of Constantinople but was offered to Charlemagne by the Empress Irene when the Holy Roman Emperor proposed marriage to her in AD 802. It has been in Chartres since 876, when Charles the Bald presented it to the town. The cathedral was built because the veil survived the 1194 fire. It is contained in a cathedral-shaped reliquary and displayed in a small side chapel off the eastern aisle. It doesn't look like much – a yellowish bolt of silk draped over a support – but as the focus of veneration for millions of the faithful for two millennia it is priceless.

portals, but the west entrance, known as the **Portail Royal**, is the only one that pre-dates the 12th-century fire. Carved from 1145 to 1155, its superb statues, whose features are elongated in the Romanesque style, represent the glory of Christ in the centre, and the Nativity and the Ascension to the right and left, respectively. The structure's other main Romanesque feature is the 112m-high **Clocher Vieux** (Old Bell Tower; also called the Tour Sud 'South Tower'), which was begun in the 1140s. It is the tallest Romanesque steeple still standing anywhere.

A visit to the 112m-high **Clocher Neuf** (New Bell Tower; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free, admission free 1st Sun of certain months; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-5.30pm Sun May-Aug, 9.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun Sep-Apr), which is also known as the Tour Nord (North Tower), is well worth the ticket price and the climb up the long spiral stairway. Access is just behind the cathedral bookshop. A 70m-high platform on the lacy Flamboyant Gothic spire, built from 1507 to 1513 by Jehan de Beauce after an earlier wooden spire burned down, affords superb views of the three-tiered flying buttresses and the 19th-century copper roof, turned green by verdigris.

The cathedral's 172 extraordinary **stained-glass windows**, almost all of which date back to the 13th century, form one of the most important ensembles of medieval stained glass in the world. The three most exquisite windows dating from the mid-12th century are in the wall above the west entrance and below the rose window. Survivors of the fire of 1194 (they were made some four decades before), the windows are renowned for the depth and intensity of their blue tones, famously called 'Chartres blue'.

The cathedral's 110m **crypt** (adult/7-18yr €2.70/2.10; ☎ tours 11am Mon-Sat, 2.15pm, 3.30pm, 4.30pm & 5.15pm daily late Jun–late Sep, 11am Mon-Sat, 2.15pm, 3.30pm & 4.30pm

daily Apr–late Jun & late Sep–Oct, 11am Mon-Sat & 4.15pm daily Nov-Mar), a tombless Romanesque structure built in 1024 around a 9th-century predecessor, is the largest in France. Tours in French (with a written English translation) lasting 30 minutes start at **La Crypte** (☎ 02 37 21 56 33; 18 Cloître Notre Dame), the cathedral-run shop selling souvenirs, from April to October. At other times they begin at the shop below the Clocher Neuf in the cathedral. The shop also rents informative English-language audioguide tours (25/45/70 minutes €3.20/4.20/6.20) until 4pm daily. Guided tours (adult/10 to 18 years €6.20/4.20) in French and English also depart from the shop.

OLD CITY

Chartres' meticulously preserved old city is northeast and east of the cathedral along the narrow western channel of the River Eure, which is spanned by a number of footbridges. From rue Cardinal Pie, the stairway called **Terte St-Nicolas** and **rue Chantail** – the latter lined with medieval houses – lead down to the empty shell of the 12th-century **Collégiale St-André**, a Romanesque collegiate church closed in 1791 and severely damaged in the early 19th century and again in 1944.

Along the river's eastern bank, **rue de la Tannerie** and its extension **rue de la Foulerie** are lined with flower gardens, millraces and the restored remnants of riverside trades: wash houses, tanneries and the like. **Rue aux Juifs** (Street of the Jews), on the west bank, has been extensively renovated. Half a block down the hill there's a riverside promenade and up the hill **rue des Écuers** has many structures dating from around the 16th century, including a half-timbered, **pro-w-shaped house** at number 26, with its upper section supported by beams. At number 35 is **Escalier de la Reine Berthe** (Queen Bertha's Staircase), a towerlike covered stairwell clinging to a half-timbered house that dates back to the early 16th century.

Rue du Bourg and **rue de la Poissonnerie** also have some old half-timbered houses; on the latter, look for the magnificent **Maison du Saumon** (Salmon House), also known as the *Maison de la Truie qui File*, at numbers 10 to 12 and now a restaurant (see right), with its carved consoles of the Angel Gabriel and Mary, Michael the Archangel slaying the dragon and, of course, the eponymous salmon.

From **place St-Pierre**, you get a good view of the flying buttresses holding up the 12th- and 13th-century **Église St-Pierre** (place St-Pierre; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm). Part of a Benedictine monastery in the 7th century, it was outside the city walls and vulnerable to attack; the fortresslike, pre-Romanesque **bell tower** attached to it was used as a refuge by monks and dates from around 1000. The fine, brightly coloured **derestory windows** in the nave, the choir and the apse date from the early 14th century.

Église St-Aignan (place St-Aignan; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm), first built in the early 16th century, is interesting for its wooden barrel-vault roof (1625), arcaded nave and painted interior of faded blue-and-gold floral motifs (c 1870). The stained glass and the Renaissance **Chapelle de St-Michel** date from the 16th century.

Eating

Café Serpente (☎ 02 37 21 68 81; 2 Cloître Notre Dame; starters €6-14.80, mains €15-20; ☎ 10am-11pm) Its location bang-slap opposite the cathedral ensures

that this atmospheric brasserie and *salon de thé* (tearoom) is always full. Cuisine is traditional, and its chef also constructs well-filled sandwiches (€3.80 to €5.80).

Maison du Saumon et de la Truie qui File (☎ 02 37 36 28 00; 10-14 rue de la Poissonnerie; menus €29.80-32.90; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner to 11.30pm Tue-Sat) Inhabiting Chartres' most photographed half-timbered building, this medieval landmark cooks up a bit of everything, ranging from Polish stuffed-cabbage rolls and Hungarian goulash to Alsatian *choucroute* (sauerkraut with sausage and other prepared meats) and Moroccan *tajines* (€18.50 each).

There are a lot of food shops surrounding the **covered market** (place Billard; ☎ 7am-1pm Wed & Sat), just off rue des Changes south of the cathedral. The **Monoprix** (cnr 21 rue Noël Ballay & 10 rue du Bois Merrain; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) department store with two entrances has a supermarket on the ground floor.

Getting There & Away

More than 30 SNCF trains a day (20 on Sunday) link Paris' Gare Montparnasse (€12.90, 70 minutes) with Chartres, all of which pass through Versailles-Chantiers (€10.90, 45 minutes to one hour).

The last train to Paris leaves Chartres just after 9pm weekdays, just before 9pm on Saturday and sometime after 10pm on Sunday.