

Vézelay

Avallon

Morvan

Noyers

# Montréal in Burgundy

Guided tour of the medieval city



## Discover Montréal

Known for its remarkable Collegiate Church from the 12th century with its magnificent choir stalls from the 16th century, the village of Montréal in the department of the Yonne, 12 km north-east of Avallon, is also an ancient fortress built within a beautiful natural setting. Dominating the tranquil Serein valley, the view of which can be admired from the ramparts behind the church, the village offers its visitors a page of history with its gates, the remains of its fortifications, its ancient houses and the charm of being an unspoilt site.

Tradition says that in the 6th century Queen Brunehaut stayed there with her grandson Thierry. It is in memory of its royal hosts that the village was called Mont-Real, Mons Regalis or Mons Regius. During the French Revolution the village lost its noble title and became « Mount Serein » only for a short period before regaining its original name.

To reach the Collegiate Church and the top of the hill on which was built a castle until 1793, there will be only one street taking you through the medieval part of the village.

First you'll pass under "**The Lower Gate**", the first remains of the three walls surrounding the castle and the Collegiate church in the middle-ages. These are a fine example of the 13th century military architecture. There weren't any drawbridges, only double gates and port-cullises.

Whilst doing the tour you will notice that many Renaissance style windows have been bricked in or have lost their fine mullions. This is as a result of the tax on « doors and windows » in force at the time of the French Revolution in 1789. During this period householders removed the mullions so as to be taxed for one opening rather than two or four.

You'll also have the opportunity to admire interesting buildings from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Don't miss corbelled roofs and buttresses and discover recesses and curious shaped windows.

Don't be surprised to find some houses skimmed over with modern rough cast cement! These are houses which have been renovated at the beginning of the 20th century, a period when, in this region, the cement of Vassy was very popular. It's a heated cement mixed with sand which combines with the stone and is almost unbreakable. This same technique was used for sewers and some bridges in Paris.

You are bound to notice the wells with their stone copings. They are all different. Water isn't far away, even in the summer !

At **10 Grande Rue**, on your right, you can see a pediment of 1606 with an ovoid coat of arms. The significance of it was that this house was the property of a lady or of a widow. You'll find more examples during your visit on other houses as well on tombstones inside the Collegiate Church.

At the back of this same house in the courtyard, there's an integrated tower from the 13th century enclosing a staircase shaped like a snail's shell, giving access to the first floor. Above it you would find a pigeon loft with about 30 pigeonholes.



Opposite, **5 Grande Rue**, a house of exposed stonework with an overhang very likely to be from the 14th century. Inside there's also the base of an octagonal fireplace and in the angle of the house a flat-sided tower, only 3 of which are visible.



Again on the right, **12 Grande Rue**, where a staircase descends to a vaulted cellar with a beautiful door and a double arched lintel. Originally, this room could have been used as a garrison post for the soldiers and was then

converted into a wine cellar during the period when grapes were grown locally. Up until 1950 a few owners still had vines in sufficient numbers to harvest grapes.

From there you'll notice further up on your left a large square tower. It's a pigeon loft which has retained its pigeonholes, and nearby, as part of the house, is another flat-sided tower containing a spiral staircase.

On your right, **18 and 20 Grande Rue**, which are the two oldest houses in Montréal, dating from the 14th century and having a typical Burgundian canopy supported by a pillar of corbelled construction.

At **22 Grande Rue**, a large residence which has a round tower in the internal paved courtyard which is enclosed by its outbuildings where, in summer, you're welcome to visit its art gallery.

Again on your right, at **24 Grande Rue**, you'll see a house with a very beautiful ovoid-shaped pediment. Inside there's a charming little turret of Francis 1st which can be seen from the courtyard of the house lower down.

Now you're in the square in front of the Town Hall, site of the Ancient Hall. The cross was erected on the 18th April 1781. The plinth, even older, bears an inscription in gothic lettering. In former times there was a fountain on this spot.

Continuing your path to the right, you'll see at **28 Grande Rue**, a large Renaissance house with mullioned windows and with a spiral staircase in the tower. At the back there are also two towers, one houses a staircase and the other an oratory. It's thought to have been the house of the tax collector.

Then at **30 Grande Rue**, a curious house where the gallery was rebuilt at the beginning of the 1900's and which has on its left a stone staircase like in the towers, but the space having been restricted, the steps have been hollowed out to allow foot places.



On the left alongside the well of the Town Hall you'll see a stone sculpture of a salamander, the emblem of Francis 1st, who came to Montreal several times and famously held here the Estates General. This stone comes from the Ancient Hall.

Next, again on your right, at the bend, **38 Grande Rue**, a large dwelling, a testimony to a more recent past since it was built for a general of the Napoleonic Empire, General Habert, whose grave you'll find in the cemetery.

Also notice the little shepherd's house with its roof of Burgundian tiles. If you retrace your steps down the steep street called **Carcasson**, after the watchtower shaped like a snail's shell, carcasson in the Morvan dialect means a snail. From there, you'll see then on your left at **2 rue du Carcasson**, an early 18th century house with the emblem of knights above one of the dormer windows, a five-pointed star.

The 15th century house on your right at **3 rue du Carcasson** has a surprising head, a Baphomet, a pagan idol, on its corner. It was formerly the house of Peter Arbalestre, Provost of Montreal and in charge of the Granary of Avallon. His gravestone can be seen next to the Baptistery in the Collegiate Church. Dismantled during the French Revolution the house has kept all its charm.

Further down the **Grande Rue** at the junction of two streets, notice the paving stones that tell you it's where the second gate was standing and demolished a long time ago. An access door to the second surrounding wall has just been opened which enables you to admire the salamander carved by François Rouillot.

Continuing along the Grande Rue you'll see on both sides old houses which also have octagonal towers with spiral staircases. One of them, on the right, **42 Grande Rue**, has been magnificently restored to its original appearance having been the presbytery during the 20th century of the most senior catholic priest of Montréal.

Next you walk alongside a long stone wall where, on the other side you'd find a very beautiful garden which you'd perhaps be able to glimpse if the gates between the two lime trees are open. For several centuries the house was the official residence of the canons. On the other side of the street are the little houses which were their private homes.

Before arriving at the third gate which houses the church bells, you'll find on your left, **39 Grande Rue**, a house with mullioned windows and a round tower. It was built between the 14th and 16th centuries on the spot occupied earlier by the home of Queen Brunehaut, if you believe the legend !

Going back down again via Postern Street (a pedestrian street alongside this house), you'll be able to see, beyond the gardens in different places, the remains of the fortifications.

On continuing towards the church, on your right at **50 Grande Rue**, the house there contains very impressive cellars which have been used as guard rooms. They were in the basement of the castle ramparts.



The last house before the archway, on your left, at **45 Grande Rue**, used to be a school in the 18th century, and its most famous pupil was the young Vauban who received his first lessons in mathematics and geometry from his uncle, the Prior, Antoine de Fontaine.

Now you find yourself at the summit of the hill where the castle used to stand, but all that remains is a well being restored, and **the magnificent Collegiate Church which we invite you to visit.**



### **The Notre-Dame's Collegiate Church**

The Collegiate church was built around 1150 by Anseric 2nd, Lord of the Manor, on his return from the Second Crusade, preached by St Bernard in Vezelay, at the king Louis 7th's request. His son Anseric 3rd, defender of the Church, finished adorning it in 1170. In 1845, Viollet-le-Duc regarded it as a real architectural jewel. He gave the building an historical classification and so was granted permission to restore it.



**The façade** is pierced by a large fully rounded arched door which by itself takes up one third of the length of the façade. It is a pure example of flowery Burgundian Romanesque Art. Notice the trumeau separating the doorway in two identical wooden doors with some metal strap door hinges from the 12th century still holding against the side doors.

**The rose-window** above the doorway is one of the oldest in France having similarities with that of Notre Dame of Paris, built fifty years later.



There are plain walls pierced by windows diagonally ribbed and arched and four different crosses which elegantly crowned the four gables.

Notice that there is no bell tower as the original plan didn't have one!

As soon as you enter, you need to go down a few steps as the building has been lowered by one meter.

You will be surprised by the unity of its style. Every detail indicates that it was built at **the transition of the Romanesque and Gothic styles.**

What makes Montreal's collegiate church really famous, are **the 26 oak stalls, their 8 low relief carvings and 5 figurative groups carved in the round**, executed in the first half of the 16th century by two artisans from Nuits-sur-Armançon, the Rigolley brothers. It was almost certainly thanks to Francis 1st generosity towards the canons that we now possess them. The low reliefs represent scenes from the Bible or the Gospels, which the artists have mixed with decorative elements with which they would have been familiar. The weakness of the proportions will be forgiven so as to concentrate on the attitudes and expressions, and take your time in looking at the decoration of the pews and their misericords, notably the figurines and the little heads.

Facing the altar you should take note of on the right:

- the baptism of Christ, surmounted by the Adoration of the Magi
- David killing a lion
- the Holy Family in the workshop at Nazareth, above which are two drinkers who are said to be the Rigolley brothers themselves
- Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

and on the left:

- the Original Sin, surmounted by the Presentation in the Temple, an allegory interpreted in various ways (truth triumphant over falsehood or vice and virtue) surmounted by two cantors representing the Old and New Testaments
- the Visitation, above which two lions fight over a bone (an allusion to the quarrels of the Greats)
- the announcement of the birth of the infant Jesus to the shepherds.



There is every likelihood that some of the low-relief carvings were disfigured in 1794 when the pews were moved into the sanctuary of the church during the revolutionary period when it became a Temple of Reason.

**The alabaster altarpiece** of the 15th century, on the left hand side in the Choir, which underwent irreparable mutilations, was probably imported from Nottingham in England. It originally portrayed, in 35 figurines on 5 panels, the Mystery of the Virgin Mary with on the left, Saint Etienne, and on the right, Saint Laurent.

**The wooden triptych**, on the right of the altar, of the 16th century representing the Virgin holding the Infant Jesus, Christ as Saviour of the World, and Saint Peter holding his key.

**The wooden pulpit and the lectern** from the 15th century, finely carved in oak, give an idea of room religious decoration at the time.

**The Christ**, opposite the pulpit, dated most certainly from the 15th century. The Christ is carved with a striking expression.

**The Renaissance cross**, in the right hand side transept, discovered buried under a tree in the cemetery was broken and repaired by the sculptor Michel Rotzer.

**The tableau** of the Dutch school from the 17th century representing the coronation of the Virgin.

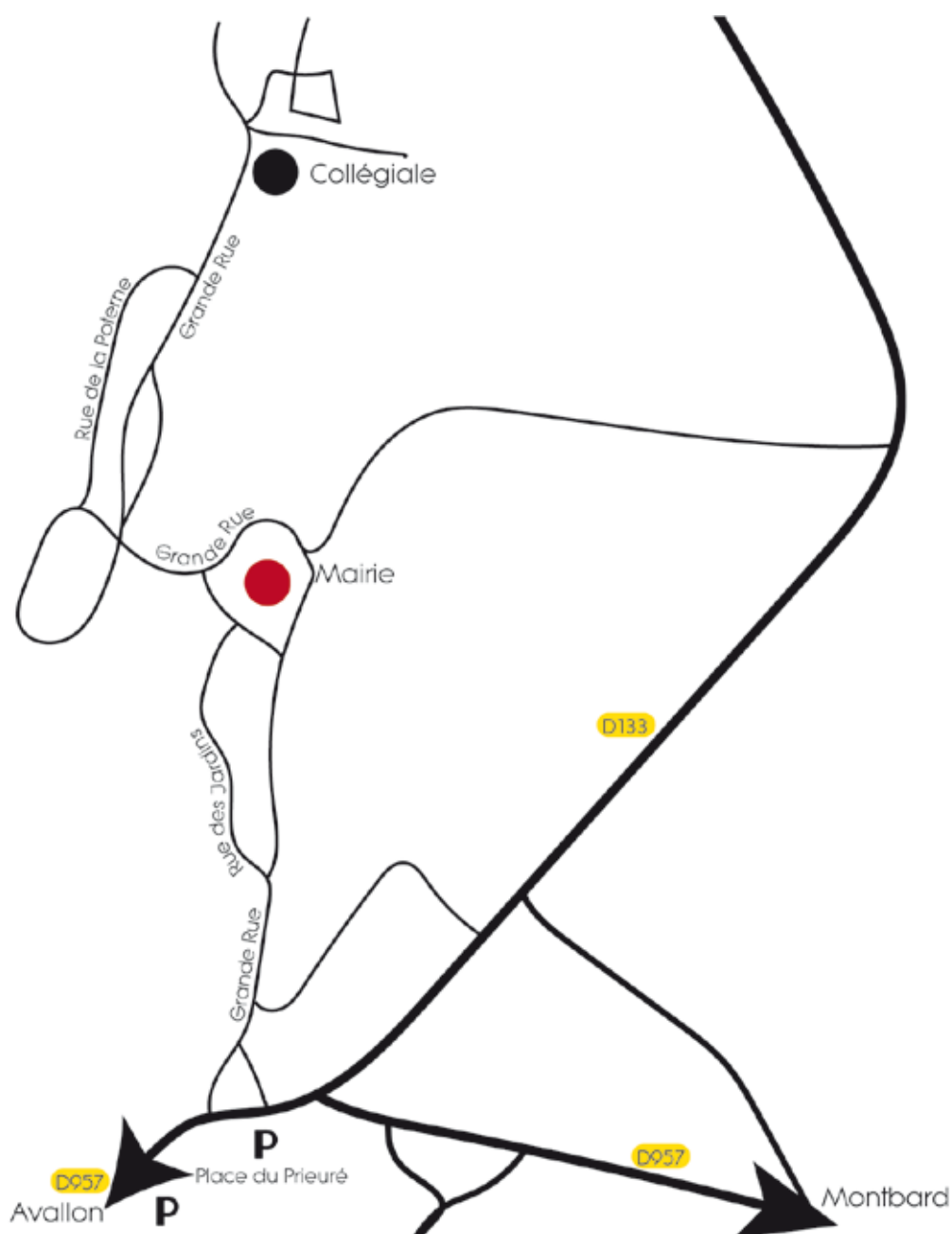
Two old sarcophagi which go back to the Merovingian period with a carved cross.

The bell of 1623, which in 1994, on the initiative of the Friends of the Collegiate Church, was taken down from above the gate of the third surrounding wall and replaced by two smaller ones.

Tombstones of the Lords of the Manor, Canons of the Church and other local notables from the 16th to the 18th century form part of the church flagstone flooring. Those standing up against the interior walls are those of :

- Jehanne, wife of Johan Desgranges, Bailiff of Auxois who departed this life in the year 1316
- Hugh... Bailiff of Auxois, who departed this life in the year 1356 - Guillemette de Messaire, lady of Montréal, formerly the wife of Huguenin Desgranges, who died in 1361
- The Noble Master Peter Arbaleste , when living, in charge of the Granary of Avallon, Lord and Provost of Montréal, who died on the 21st April, 1591.

Before leaving, we invite you to look round the cemetery. Under foot you'll see the ancient fortifications, and to your left and right the bases of two square towers.



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