

Vézelay

Avallon

Monvan

Noyers

Noyers sur Serein

Visit of the medieval City



Noyers's city map

Office de Tourisme Intercommunautaire Vézelay-Avallon-Morvan-Serein
 Bureau d'accueil de Noyers
 12 Place de l'Hôtel de Ville - 89310 Noyers
 03 86 82 66 06 - ot.noyers-montreal.fr
 www.tourisme-serein.fr



The old fortified castle of Noyers built at the end of the 12th century under the dynasty of the Lords Miles of Noyers, on the Hill of St George before its destruction ordered by King Henry 4th in 1599

- A / The Large Orchards
- 1 / The keep
- B / Lower Bailey
- 2 / Seigneurial residence
- C / Upper Bailey
- 3 / Cistern
- 4 / Chapel

The fortress was established right on the top of a triangular shaped hill with two of its sides overlooking the river. From its southward side towards Noyers there was an access to the village through a tower with a drawbridge, the Gate of Venise. The north side of the fortress, not as steep, was protected by a large courtyard called "les Grands Vergers" or "the Large Orchards" (A) surrounded by a wall with towers and then by a deep

ditch carved in the rock and by a wall strengthened with five towers.

Behind was the Lower Bailey (B), with the soldiers' quarters and a chapel. Finally the actual castle with the C (C) separated from the previous courtyard by a double moat. It was a large square keep dating from 11th century (1), a cistern (3), a chapel (4) and the seigneurial residence (2)

The access to the castle was protected at the front by further defensive works such as a drawbridge and walls. Noyers castle was a very important stronghold naturally protected and with three surrounding walls, several large moats, over twenty towers and gates with drawbridges.

Some history !

In the 11th century the name of the City of Noyers, classified today as one of the most beautiful villages in France, was « Nucerio », a latin word for « Nux - Nuces » meaning nuts, supposedly because of the great quantity of walnut trees growing in the area at the time. Then later on in the 14th century the name changed to « Noihers » until the 16th century when the actual spelling came into place.

The territory of Noyers was strategically located on the border of the Duchy of Burgundy and required to be well protected. The North – South road used to go through Noyers from the North gate, the Gate of Tonnerre, to the South gate, the Gate of Avallon, which contributed to make Noyers a very prosperous place as travelers stopped in Noyers on their way northwards or southwards.

The first Lords of Noyers, the Miles of Noyers, were great builders. They built an impressive castle on the top of the St George's Hill overlooking the village. In spite of standing as one of the most powerful castles in Burgundy, the castle was completely destroyed by the French king Henry 4th in 1599 as he became tired of too numerous sieges during the religious wars. Nowadays only ruins can be seen on the site. Nineteen out of the twenty three towers built round Noyers in the 13th century as part of the City walls still remain.

Ashlar stately homes of 18th century, half-timbered houses of 15th and 16th centuries, simple wine growers houses, old chapels, convents, squares with arcades and defensive towers ...

Noyers is really the ideal place to go back in time !

1 - **The Painted Gate or the Gate of Avallon**

This 18 meter high rectangular gate built with lime stone dating from the first half of the 13th century has a round arched door. The gate was refurbished in the 15th century. The side facing the town was formerly covered with the Lords of Noyers' coat of arms, hence its name. On each side of the gate a staircase gave access to the watchmen's room on the first floor and from there to the rampart walkway on the curtain walls.

2 - **Walk of the Moats and of Charles-Louis Pothier, along the river Serein**

In 1778 the City walls were knocked down under the Duke of Luynes, the last Lord of Noyers, as their use as a defensive system was not required any longer. The stones were used to fill up the moats and to cover part of the bed of the river Serein which was flowing alongside the City walls on the East side of the City, thus creating a path along the river. The filling up of the moat and river has buried the lower parts of the 13th century towers except for the last tower, the 9th one from the Gate of Avallon, built in the 16th century. These towers are very well preserved as most of them are private properties. In the 15th and 16th centuries houses were built against the inside walls of the City. Then in the 18th century other houses were built against the outside walls. Charles-Louis Pothier, a Burgundian composer and lyric writer, lived in the 5th tower known as the Old Tower where he found his inspiration for writing popular French songs

3 - **The Hidden Tower**

The 7th tower to the left of the Saint Nicholas Hospice has been enveloped by a 19th century style building. One can see part of the tower on the side of the building. The 8th tower called the "Large Tower" attached to the Hospice was built where the City walls rest upon the limestone rock where it forms a small cliff.

4 - **The Tower of the Wolf**

The 9th tower called the Tower of Venoise or the Tower of the Wolf was attached to the Gate of Venoise and served as a guard tower protecting the north-east access of Noyers. It commanded the route to Dijon going from the south gate or Painted Gate all the way across Noyers to the Venoise Gate. Its name might originate from the tale of a stray wolf found in the cellar of the tower. It is also reported that when prisoners were tortured in the cellar their voices sounded like wolves howling. A third reason would be a phonetic change in the pronunciation of the word water, "la tour à l'eau" changed into "la tour au loup" as under the tower a spring comes out intermittently in which women used to wash their linen up to the 19th century when a wash house was built outside the village. Linen could also be washed in the river Serein accessible through special openings in the wall alongside the river.



5 - The Square of the "Saut Parabin"

Exercise area and parade ground where soldiers used to exercise. It was the passageway between the castle and the city. It is bordered on the east side by the city walls, on the North side by the Gate of Venoise and by steep rocks on top of which was built the access door to the castle. A two sided cross was erected on this place in 1775 with on one side the Christ and on the other the Virgin Mary. The name of the Square comes from the 16th century religious wars when Catholics and Protestants were fighting and tortured on this place, then thrown into the river over the wall for a « bain/bath ». Over 162 people were supposedly thrown into the river flowing alongside the City walls.

6 - Passage way in the street of Venoise and a black cat

The street of Venoise was the first street built in Noyers and carved into the rock from the castle hill. Down this street on the right hand side there is a passage way called « La Seustache » leading to the Gate of Tonnerre in Rue Franche. Half way down on the left hand side there is a black cat perched on a roof. Whilst in medieval times black cats were not liked, they are now cherished in Noyers.

7 - The Gate of Tonnerre

This 13th century rectangular gate is also called the Gate of Sainte-Verote. It has a pointed arch and had its upper floors demolished. In the recess to the right of the gate there is a statue of the Virgin Mary called Sainte-Verote dated from the 16th century and rescued from the bottom of a well and restored in the 19th century. She became the patron saint of the local wine growers who every year on 15th of August used to tie a green grape called "verot" round her wrist and came in a procession to ask her to protect their vines from bad weather. The tradition has it that the wine growers' unmarried daughters all dressed in white also came to pray the Virgin on 25th November to help them find a husband. Beyond the gate there is a toll with cannon ports from the 16th century when Noyers was granted by the king the right to tax merchants a right of way before entering the city to put the municipal finances on a sounder footing.

8 - Street of the Wine Growers

In the 18th and 19th centuries wine growers were an important part of Noyers inhabitants until 1890 when vine plants were completely destroyed by the phylloxera. A large part of this population lived in the west side of the village in small houses with a common room on the first floor and a stair case above a cellar at ground level. The roof was made with local flat stones. Few houses of this type are still left to be seen in the street now called the Wine Growers Street.

9 - The House of the Golden Fleece (Rue Franche)

Once in the Franche alley way you can see a sign with the name « The Court of Miracles » on a house on the left hand side of the street. At the end of this alley way you are in Rue Franche where you can see a cut stone stately house dated from the 15th century with a cross carved on the first floor representing at the top the bust of a bearded Greek man, then underneath the head of a sheep above a fleece and a collar of an order of knighthood at the bottom. The carving symbolizes the Greek myth of "Jason and the Golden Fleece". This stately home was built by a knight of the Golden Fleece, an order of knighthood created in 1430 in Bruges by the Duke of Burgundy Philippe 3rd the Good when he married Isabel of Portugal. In 1419 his mother the Duchess of Burgundy bought the City of Noyers and the castle after the extinction of the dynasty of the Lords Miles of Noyers.

Her son inherited it when his mother died in 1424. During the 2nd World War this house was occupied by German Officers who painted some derogatory portraits of their superiors which can still be seen on the walls inside the house.

10 - Magdalen Square and the Throw of Ball

A wooden box with the date 1231 is embedded in the wall of the house on the corner of Rue Franche and the Square. Inside the box there are small wooden balls. The date celebrates the exemption of taxes for a section of the City. The story has it that the Lord of the castle needed money to refurbish the fortifications and made a deal with the inhabitants of Noyers. They would be exempted from the most important tax which was an inheritance tax, but not all of Noyers, just a section of the City. The Lady of the castle determined the border by throwing a bowl down from the castle which reached the corner of this house. This tax exemption is still celebrated every 14th July with a game of bowls.

11 - Magdalen Square and the Chapel of Saint Nicholas the Old

The name of was given to the Square in memory of the Marquess of Ragny, Francis of the Magdalen who was the governor of the town and the castle of Noyers and a friend of the King Henry 4th. He took part in the fight between the King's troops and their Catholic opponents headed by the Baron of Vitteaux who stormed the castle of Noyers in 1592. Francis of the Magdalen was seriously injured during the battle. Facing the Square the Lords Miles of Noyers' Chapel called Saint Nicholas the Old was erected by the last Lord of the family in 1369 with inside a stone mausoleum to shelter the graves of the Miles family's members. Later on in 1633 the Chapel was given to a religious order, the Fathers of the Christian Doctrine and then to the Ursuline nuns whose convent was nearby. That's when an arched passage way was built between the convent and the Chapel to enable the nuns to go straight from their convent into the Chapel to take part in the mass. During the French Revolution the Chapel became a meeting place for a local revolutionary group, the Jacobins, and in 1793, under the Terror, the Chapel was plundered and the graves of the Miles were destroyed. Then it became national property and was sold to a weaver, a rich family, a farmer and since 1972 to an antiques and ancient books seller.

12 - Square of the Salt Warehouse and the House of the "KAMATO"

The Salt Warehouse represented an outstanding mark of the importance of Noyers as it served 33 communes in salt. The tax salt was introduced in Noyers in 14th century to regulate the price of salt, a royal monopoly. The "manor house" at the other end of the warehouse was the tax collector's house which gives an idea of the income gained from the sale of salt. An underground private access to the tax collector's garden can be seen from the "Oven Alley way" on the side of the house. The name of this alleyway refers to the presence of a "banal" oven or the Lord's oven where peasants had to bake bread and pay for the use of it. Opposite the Salt Warehouse stands a cut stone house dated from 15th century. A Greek name "KAMATΩ" is engraved above the door and means "through pain or suffering". The first floor was where the bailiff of Noyers gave justice. The ground floor was a resting place on the pilgrim route of St James of Compostella as indicated by a scallop carved above the door underneath a small oval window added in the 17th century.





13- *The Inn*

This inn is a 15th century half-timbered house refurbished in the 18th century following the second fire in Noyers which destroyed one wall on the right hand side of the building which was rebuilt with carved stones from the castle. As an example of this addition to the house is the window surround decorated with a double pointed arch, the coat of arms of the Duchy of Burgundy and a fleur-de-lis, emblem of the former French royalty.

14 - *The Small Street*

A large house in this street at no 14 was the St Andrew's Hospice from 1855 to 1984. The house used to be a stately home where King Louis 14th stopped on three occasions to spend the night on his way to Dijon. On the left hand side of the building there is a classical Greek style column. From this street you can go to the West part of the City through very narrow alley ways. Poor people used to live in the western parts of Noyers called the Lower Streets.

15 - *The Square of the "Wine merchants Small Stop off"*

Opposite St Andrew's Hospice there is a portico leading to a small square where wine trade took place. Wine merchants who carried their wine on carts had to stop off on the way to let their wine rest for a few days in superimposed cellars under the Square. There you can also admire three different style houses such as a 15th century house decorated with small twisted carved columns round the windows, a polychromatic stone statue of St Vincent, the patron saint of the wine growers, is carved in the corner of a 16th century house decorated with three wooden statues. The first one is the statue of St Barbara, a Christian martyr kept prisoner in a tower, the second one is the statue of Mary Magdalene with a bottle of perfume and the last one is the statue of the Christ as a child dominating the world. Opposite there is a 17th century house whose front wall is entirely flat without carvings and over hanging floors so that timbers could be notched to enable the wood to be coated in order to halt the spread of fires as stipulated by a decree issued by King Henry 4th in the early 17th century. Ground floors had to be built in stone.

16 - *The Street of the "Royal Weight" and the Guild Hall*

From there you pass through the porch to the Street of the "Royal Weight" whose name comes from a reference weight to be used by merchants for weighing merchandise and formerly stored under the porch. Besides numerous merchants there were also lots of craftsmen in Noyers. At the end of the street there is the Guild Hall, one the most remarkable houses in Noyers with late gothic decoration from the 15th century. The cobbler guild occupied this house as shown by two wooden sculptures of their patron saints carved in the oak of the corner post. On one side you can see the patron saint of shoemakers, St Crepin, cutting a piece of leather and on the other side the patron saint of cobblers, St Crepinien sewing a slipper. Under each saint there is an angel, one holding a shield and the other holding a scroll. In the center there is an empty recess under a gothic gable and underneath an angel with a shield. In the corner of the house stands the sculpture of a bearded bourgeois holding a shield in his right hand and an axe in his left hand who might have been a militiaman. The house is also called the House of the "Compagnonnage" as Companions used to do their apprenticeship in this house.

17 - The Square of the Corn Market

Fairs and markets used to take place on this square attracting merchants from the whole of Burgundy, Champagne and the Auxerrois. Thanks to the geographical location of Noyers in the border of these three provinces the city became very prosperous. The most important market was the corn market taking place every 3rd Thursday in the month. In bad weather conditions merchants could find shelter under the arcades of the 15th century «White Cross Hotel». In the 17th century a stone wall was added as an extension to this house resting on arcades supporting the upper floors. At the top there are three small windows with volutes carved in the window surrounds.

From the square you can see the church « Our Lady of Noyers » in gothic flamboyant style. It was built between 1491 and 1515 with flying buttresses and windows with pointed arches. Its 33 meter high tower crowned with a lantern served as a watchtower. The main entrance divided in two by a trumeau is surmounted by twelve empty recesses which in the past used to shelter the twelve apostles. The statues were destroyed in the second half of the 16th century when Noyers became protestant.

Further down the Church Street, on the right hand side, stands the former College established by the Fathers of the Christian doctrine on the City walls in 1633. This T shape building houses the Museum of the « Popular and Naïve Arts ». In the courtyard a sun dial dated 1715 can be seen on the wall of the College with a Latin inscription which invites one to meditate on time taking its toll.

We are now going towards the Wine Growers Street and the « Aa » Square the name of which is of Celtic origin meaning water. An opening was made in 1840 through the City walls to enable cattle and wood delivery to get through to the Aa Square. A bridge was built over a stream running in the former ditch at the South and West of Noyers. On the Square there used to be a wash house and a wine press. You can still see the Old Cinema. In the Street of the "Jeu de Paume" you come across the entrance to the Ursuline nuns' former convent. Then you are back to the Corn Market Square where you can see on the right outside a typical corbelled out half-timbered house from 15th century called the "Wild Boars House" with the remains of a decoration of the "Burgundian Boars" swallowing a twisted beam.

18 - The Town Hall Square

At the beginning of the 14th century a municipal building used to be where the Town Hall is now. The foundations date from the 14th century, the main building from the 15th century and the front from the 18th century. In the 15th century a first fire destroyed the 14th century building entirely which was then rebuilt in the style of the time with late gothic decoration on the ground floor and a timbered wall on the first floor as shown in the courtyard at the back of the building. The 16th century jails can also be seen in the courtyard. Then a second fire destroyed only the front part of the building in the 18th century. It was rebuilt in 1765 in a Louis 15th or pure baroque style. A bust of Louis 14th was nestled in the recess above the door and was removed during the French Revolution. The second refurbishment of the Town Hall took place under the Duke of Luyne, Lord of Noyers at the time. Other interesting houses are found on the Square such as the 15th century "Yellow House" with carved beams and corbels with hunting scene and vines and houses with arcades next to the Town Hall. In 1830 the Square was called the Square of Lafayette.

Accueil de Noyers
12 Place de l'Hôtel de Ville - 89310 Noyers
Tél : +33 (0)3 86 82 66 06
ot.noyers-montreal@orange.fr