

THE CATHEDRAL OF COUTANCES

Cathedral is the landmark of the Coutances area and can be seen from the sea and bocage.

Throughout THE CENTURIES

An 11th century Romanesque structure

The diocese of Coutances was founded at the end of the 5th century, but the cathedral built is unknown to us.

Following the Viking invasions, the bishopric was then moved to Rouen at the end of the 9th century and it was only in the peaceful 11th century that the bishopric was able to return and a new cathedral built. It was bishop Geoffroy de Montbray, elected in 1048, who had this Romanesque edifice built, using granite from Chausey (archipelago off the coast of Granville), a large part of which has been preserved in the walls and towers of the nave in the current cathedral.

A 13th century Gothic exterior

In the early 13th century, bishop Hugues de Morville began work on the current Gothic structure. The nave and towers were enveloped in locally quarried limestone, the lantern tower, transept and choir were totally rebuilt and tall spires graced the facade towers. A harmonious intertwining of columns and vaulting between the nave and choir adds grace to the edifice.

Norman Gothic architecture typically emphasizes verticality and Coutances cathedral is a good example of this, with its tall columns stretching from floor to vault, thus giving a false impression of even greater height. The sculpted décor is understated and composed of geometrical figures and leaved

motifs. Its lantern tower has many openings to allow light through and its great height inspires a feeling of vertigo as you look down.

An edifice which has retained a certain harmony throughout the ages

At the end of the 13th century and beginning of the 14th century, side chapels were added. In the 14th century, the Lady Chapel was enlarged.

The wars of religion and the Revolution destroyed part of the décor, but the cathedral was spared any further damage during the bombings of 1944. Fortunately, its beautiful medieval stained glass windows had been removed for safekeeping, meaning we can still admire them today. The cathedral is a listed historic monument. Maintenance is ensured by the state.

3 WAYS TO VISIT THE CATHEDRAL

Self-guided tour of the lower parts

Access to the monument is free and unrestricted during opening hours.

Please note, however, that religious ceremonies may occasionally compromise access to this place of worship.

Audio-guided tour of the lower parts

A 45-minute self-guided tour of the lower parts of the building allows you to learn more about its history and architectural details.

Available for hire from the tourist office - €3. Available in English and French

Guided tour of the upper parts

Breathtaking! Follow the guide into the heart of the building.

Follow the guide into the heart of the building. A vertiginous tête-à-tête leads you to discover the backstage of this Norman Gothic jewel.

Dates, conditions and booking with Coutances Tourisme - fee required.

key FIGURES

Total length : 95 m
Total width : 34 m
Height of the nave : 22 m
Height of the lantern tower under vaulting : 41 m
Total height of the lantern tower : 57 m
Height of facade towers : 77 m



COUTANCES TOURISME

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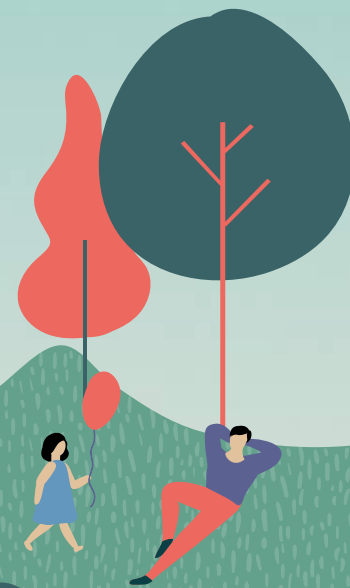
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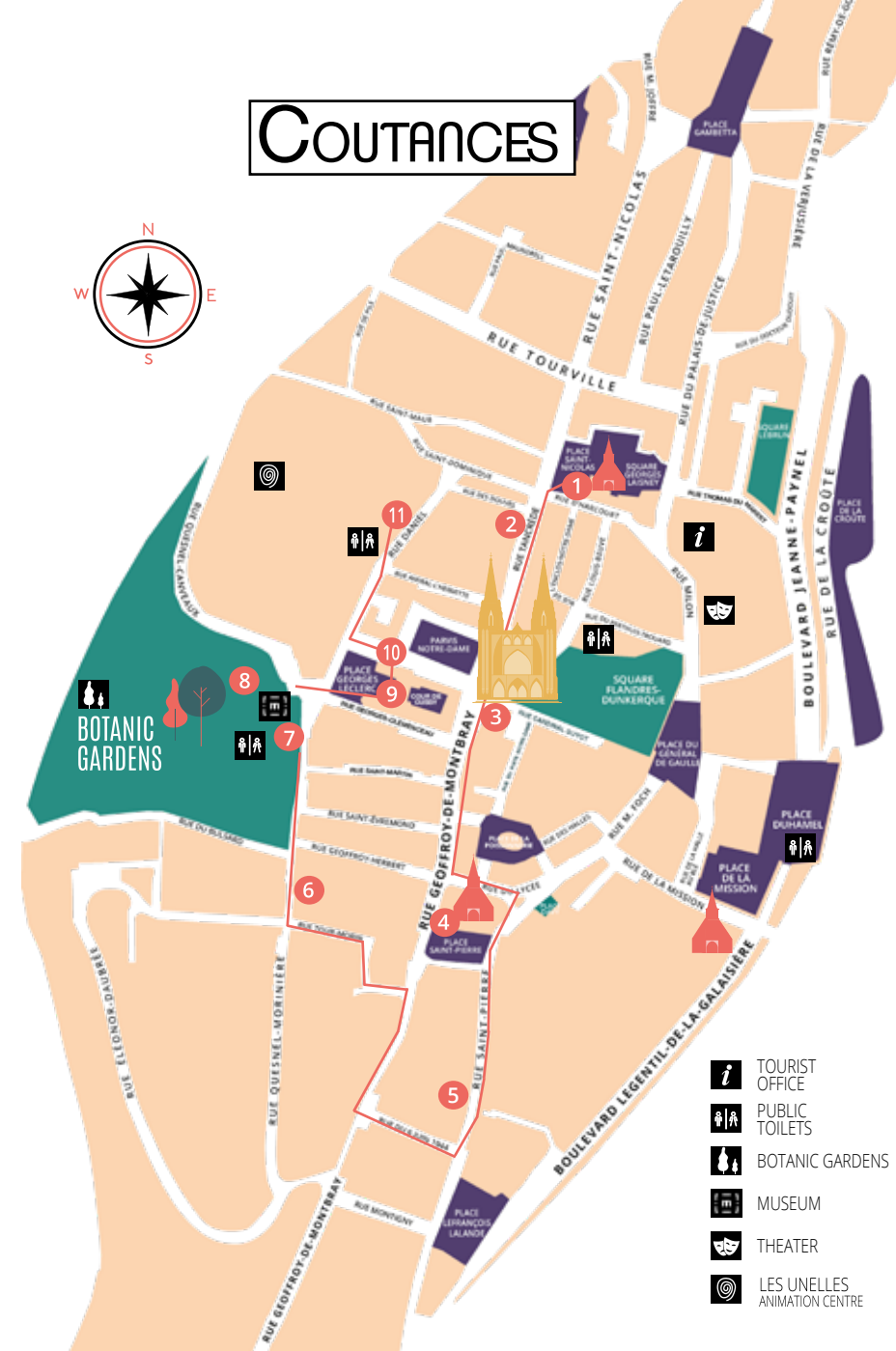
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COUTANCES DISCOVERING





COUTANCES

SELF GUIDED

Duration of walk : one hour

1 Leave the TIC and go up towards the town centre. On reaching Saint-Nicolas Square, admire the former parish church of Saint-Nicolas (now desacralised).

Dating essentially from the 16th and 17th centuries, it is a fine example of the late Gothic style. It is home to exhibitions throughout the year, including a major one in the summer.

Opposite, see a sign for a beauty shop : this is the site of a former chandlery, **Maison Hélie**, with a facade (1900), flanked by two overhanging turrets.

2 Walk up Rue Tancrede, taking care to look above shop signs.

The **Delamarre de Crux townhouse**, now home to a bank, boasts an 18th century facade consisting of granite window frames, consoles under window-sills and sculpted dormer windows. Next door, you will see a facade of false wooden beams from the early 20th century. The first floor is decorated with grimacing faces and the adjoining facade is that of a former butcher's shop (bull on stone, Art Deco style).

3 The **cathedral**: You can find more information about the cathedral on the back of the leaflet.

4 Carry on down towards Rue Geoffroy-de-Montbray as far as Saint-Pierre Church.

Saint-Pierre Church was built at the end of the 15th century and 16th century and combines the flamboyant Gothic style with that of the Renaissance.

5 Leave the church and go down Rue Saint-Pierre, a steep road behind the church.

You are now in one of the oldest artisanal areas of the town, which has succeeded in preserving its medieval appearance : note alleys leading to the backyards of single-storey and two-storey houses. The lintels on ancient dwellings are sometimes decorated with accolades typical of the Coutances area of the 15th and 16th centuries. At numbers 17 and 24 dating from the 16th century, street-facing facades still show the traces of former shop fronts. Note details such as bay windows/doors and protruding stone window sills that served as display counters.

6 At bottom of Rue Saint-Pierre, turn right into Rue du 6 Juin 1944, then go up part of Rue Geoffroy de Montbray and turn left into Rue Tour Morin, at the end of which, turn right into Rue Quesnel-Morinière. This aristocratic area was built from the 16th century on the site of the former town

boundary. Note townhouses (17th/18th/19th centuries), which open out onto yards and gardens at the back. The flamboyant Gothic accolades on some of their lintels suggest possible pre-17th century construction.

7 Carry on up Rue Quesnel-Morinière towards the Botanic Gardens.

Botanic Gardens : created between 1852 and 1855, the botanic gardens, bequeathed by Mr Quesnel-Morinière, are amongst the oldest in Normandy. They offer a harmonious marriage of French symmetry, English coppicing and Italian terracing. Discover a collection of rare tree species, superb flowerbeds, flower mosaics, a maze... a place which encourages strolling and daydreaming. Listed historic garden since 1992.

8 After wandering round the garden, find time to visit the **Quesnel-Morinière museum**.

Housed in a late 17th century mansion, exhibits include medieval statues, paintings and sculptures from the 17th century to the present day as well as a remarkable collection of ceramics from the Cotentin.

9 Leave the museum and turn left towards the small tree-lined Georges Leclerc Square. Walk as far as the iron gates and look up towards the facade. It was remodelled in the 19th century by adding two superimposed galleries.

Go into the courtyard and, if you wish, you can visit the **wedding room** and **town hall entrance** (at top of steps, turn left under arcade, enter building, take the first door on your right). Note the murals painted by Charles Rocher de Géigné in the 1930's.

10 Leave the building the way you came in and turn right towards Cathedral Square.

On your right is the **town hall**. This was the former De Cussy townhouse (17th/18th centuries).

It was extended between 1905 and 1907 in 17th century French style. Note the impact left by bombs and bullets in WW2 on the facade.

11 Turn into Rue Daniel (behind restaurant) and go down the side road (or use the steps) towards the Unelles Community Centre. Opposite you is the **Great Seminary**.

Built between 1853 and 1868 on the site of a former 13th century Dominican convent, it was intended to receive 300 trainee priests. However, due to lack of students, it was converted to the **Unelles Community Centre** in 1983.

End of the walk.

A SHORT HISTORY OF COUTANCES

The town of Coutances has a thousand-year history.

Built on top of a hill, it is surrounded by three valleys and three rivers, the Prépont, the Soulles and the Bulsard. This strategic position made it the perfect place for the 'Unelles', a Gaulish tribe, to settle and consequently name 'Cosédia' before the Roman conquest.

In the 4th century, it became Constancia and the see of a bishopric. In medieval times, Coutances was the administrative and judicial capital of the Cotentin and flourished under bishops like Geoffroy de Montbray.

However, various conflicts made their mark: in the 11th century, the Vikings sacked the town; in the 15th century, the English occupied Coutances during the Hundred Years' War and wars of religion and the Plague ravaged the area in the 16th century. Following the revolt of the 'Nus-Pieds' in 1639 (severely repressed by Chancellor Séguier), the town then enjoyed a period of calm until the Revolution.

The end of the 16th century saw the birth in Coutances of a new industry, printing. In 1597, Le Cortel, a master printer, delivered the first book ever to be printed in Coutances.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, impressive townhouses were built by the nobility all along the current rue Quesnel-Morinière. In 1795, the 'Préfecture' was relocated to Saint-Lô (30 km away).

Up to the Second Empire, Coutances' economy was closely linked to agriculture, craftsmanship and manufacturing activities.

The railways came late to the area (the Saint-Lô-Coutances line was opened in 1878), which led to economic and industrial slowdown which the Manche only made up after World War Two.

Following the German occupation during WW2, Coutances was devastated by the bombings of 6th and 13th June 1944 (60% destroyed). The reconstruction began under Louis Arretche in 1947 and lasted for ten years. The architect modernised the original road lines and organisation of traffic, whilst maintaining the traditional outward appearance of rebuilt houses.

Coutances continued developing to the north of its boundaries via new areas and the building of an industrial estate.

