

St Paul de Vence®



History and heritage in Saint-Paul de Vence

Saint-Paul de Vence, city of arts. Yes, but not only! Although readily associated with artists and their works, Saint-Paul de Vence is also a major heritage hotspot on the French Riviera.

Perched on a hill overlooking the countryside and the Mediterranean Sea, the village of Saint-Paul de Vence constitutes an open-air museum. A wealth of treasures are tucked away in its narrow streets, on its squares and around its ramparts. Saint-Paul de Vence has plenty of surprises to spring!

Outstanding heritage

The outstanding heritage of the fortified village of Saint-Paul de Vence is showcased within a **protected and almost entirely pedestrian zone**. Several hundred years of village life are reflected in **remarkable examples of military architecture (towers, high walls, a bastioned enclosure), religious constructions (collegiate church, chapels) and everyday buildings (old houses, washhouses, fountains)**. The monuments and other features of greatest historical, architectural or artistic interest are on France's national heritage list.



Each monument bears witness to events that marked the history of the village. **Its past as a military border stronghold between the 14th and the end of the 19th century is echoed in vestiges of the village's medieval wall, such as the *Porte de Vence* gateway and the *Tour de l'Esperon* tower. Both date back to the second half of the 14th century. But the jewel in Saint-Paul's military crown is its bastioned outer wall, constructed during the reign of François 1 in the 1540s. It has battled through in outstanding shape and still fully encircles the village, giving Saint-Paul de Vence its easily recognisable silhouette.**

In medieval days, Saint-Paul de Vence was an administrative capital - of a bailiwick in the 14th century, then of a viguerie in the 16th century. A prosperous town, it was home to noble and bourgeois families, such as the Bernardis and the Barcillons, whose homes opened onto Rue Grande. Strolling around the village squares and streets, visitors can still pick out a thousand and one architectural details evoking the splendour of those

houses: a portal decorated with rusticated stone, a doorway topped with an ogee arch, mullioned windows, gemel windows, a sculpted, dated lintel, etc.

Monuments such as washhouses, wells, mills and fountains bear witness to life long ago in the village.



In the 17th and 18th centuries, the town experienced a religious renewal thanks to the Bishop of Vence, Antoine Godeau. In 1666, the church was raised to the rank of collegiate church and was embellished with outstanding altarpieces and furnishings. Several chapels were built in the surrounding countryside, or renovated, including Saint-Charles & Saint-Claude's and Saint-Georges'.



At the beginning of the 20th century, Saint-Paul de Vence started to attract artists. Famous and not-so-famous artists alike were fascinated by the landscape and the light. Some settled in the village. The works of Jean-Michel Folon, Marc Chagall, Rémi Pesce, Giuliano Mancini and many more are now exhibited in the museums, streets and squares of Saint-Paul. Their works constitute a rich and varied

artistic heritage.

Repères

1388
Dédiction du comté de Nice à la Savoie : Saint-Paul devient cité frontalière – construction d'une enceinte médiévale.

1666
L'église, élevée au rang de collégiale, est embellie de plusieurs autels baroques.

1538
François 1^{er} vient à Saint-Paul : il décide de faire construire les puissants remparts bastionnés qui protègent aujourd'hui encore le village.

1872
La commune achète les remparts et les sauve ainsi de la démolition.

1920
Saint-Paul s'ouvre aux artistes : Soutine, Dufy, Signac posent leur chevalet au village et séjournent à la Colombe d'Or.

1964
Inauguration de la Fondation Maeght qui expose les grands artistes du 20^{ème} siècle, tels Braque, Léger, Matisse ou Calder.

1950
Pose des premiers galets en « calade » dans les rues du village.

1985
Marc Chagall meurt à Saint-Paul où il s'était installé 19 ans plus tôt : il repose au cimetière du village.

2008
Inauguration de la chapelle des Pénitents Blancs décorée par Folon.



Listed monuments

Seven of St-Paul's monuments are listed heritage buildings: three at national level, four at regional level:

1. **Saint-Paul's collegiate church** / 2.9.1921 / national level
2. **12th-century tower at the town hall** / 23.9.1922 / national level
3. ***Porte de Vence gateway and Tour de l'Esperon tower*** / 15.5.1926 / regional level
4. **Village fountain** / 4.10.1932 / regional level
5. **Main entrance** / 21.10.1932 / regional level
6. **Ramparts and cemetery** / 20.2.1945 / national level
7. **Chapel of Notre Dame de la Gardette** / 10.06.1993 / regional level

The **Maeght Foundation** was awarded the "**20th-Century Heritage**" label on 28.11.2000.

Over thirty items in the church are national treasures: paintings, altarpieces, furnishings, valuables. The painting of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, attributed to Spanish baroque painter Claudio Coello, is one of the collegiate church's great attractions.

Conscious of how precious its heritage is, Saint-Paul de Vence regularly carries out work to conserve, restore and showcase it. For example, restoration work was carried out in the collegiate church at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, and a large-scale campaign to restore the south-western flank of the bastioned perimeter wall was launched in 2005.



Showcasing our heritage

The Saint-Paul de Vence town council and Tourist Information Office strive to showcase the village's heritage.

Several years ago, an ambitious project was launched to light up heritage gems. New lighting inside the church now shows off its volumes, architecture and furnishings, as well as the stucco- and gold-work of the altarpieces. And spotlights around the south-western flank of the ramparts underscore the magnificence of curtain walls and bastions at night.



The artwork inside heritage buildings can add yet another dimension. The two most shining examples are the chapels of the White Penitents and of Saint-Charles & Saint-Claude. The former was completely decorated at the beginning of the 2000s by Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon. He created an extraordinary décor of sculptures, paintings and stained-glass, plus a huge mosaic inspired by the history of the White Penitents Brotherhood. Saint-Charles & Saint-Claude's Chapel was redecorated a few years ago by Paul Conte, an artist from Nice. He created two cycles of murals illustrating the life of the saints after whom the chapel is

named.

The chapels have thus written a new page in their history, thanks to the work of two artists.

Follow the guide...

Tourist Information Office guides give you the keys to understanding Saint-Paul de Vence in 10 themed visits.

The Tourist Information Office has amassed substantial experience in organising guided tours on general and more specialised themes, inviting visitors to deepen their knowledge of the village's heritage and history. Architecture is naturally a key feature, but so is art, in guided tours of the Folon Chapel and the Maeght Foundation.



Information and reservations at the Tourist Information Office:

Tel. +33 (0)4 93 32 86 95 - Mail. serviceguide@saint-pauldevence.com



For more content and information about the history and heritage of Saint-Paul de Vence, browse our "History" pages – Click here: <https://www.saint-pauldevence.com/en/history/>

Download photos from the library on the website.

PRESS CONTACT

Sandrine Léonard

Manager of the Tourist Office of Saint-Paul de Vence

Tel. +33 (0)4 93 32 86 95

Mail. direction@saint-pauldevence.com