

AT THE SHELTER OF THE RAMPARTS...

# AVALLON

DESTINATION GRAND VÉZELAY

GB

Office de Tourisme  
du GRAND VÉZELAY

Avallon - Montréal - Mavault - Noyers

AVALLON IABALLO IN OLD FRENCH, MEANING APPEL IS A SMALL CITY IN THE SOUTH OF L'YONNE IN THE HEART OF BURGUNDY, AT THE NORTHERN POINT OF THE THE PARC NATUREL RÉGIONAL DU MORVAN.

Situated atop of a granite spur, surrounded by ramparts, Avallon sits 100 meters above the valley of the river Cousin, overlooking the Morvan countryside and dominating several valleys. Having played an important military role throughout the centuries, this historical town is now surrounded by terraced gardens that have been cultivated since the 10th century.

This naturally protected site appears to have been inhabited since prehistoric times. During Gallo-Roman times near the Agrippa roman road (now Rue de Lyon) a Roman stronghold sat on the rocky spur. In the 4th century, Saint-Martin de Tours christianised the area and very soon a church was dedicated to him. One hundred years later, the Barbarians crossed over the Rhine and invaded the Western part of the Roman Empire which disappeared in 476.

A long period of troubles begins in the 9th century, leading Avallon to build its first defensive stone wall as protection the wars between the Francs and the Burgondes. This was followed by wars led by the Merovingians and then the Carolingians wanting to gain power. In 987, Hugues Capet founded the Capetian dynasty, due to last, but the wars know no end. Follows a period of calm under Henri 1st when the fortifications around Avallon become unnecessary and are demolished in the 11th century.

The 100 year war brings new trials and tribulations in the 14th century: pillaging, destruction, pestilence and famine... the defences are rebuilt and seventeen new towers are added. Avallon, a border town, is occupied by two opposing powers. In 1477 the Duchy of Burgundy is reintegrated in the Kingdom of France. A period of peace and prosperity settles in for a century. Unfortunately, in 1562, religious wars break out plunging the region into despair and mourning.

In the 17th century, Avallon thrives but is hit by several bouts of plague. A century later, peace finally returns. The fortifications, now useless and obsolete, are progressively abandoned.

In the 19th century thanks to its river, economic activity develops with cereal mills, oil mills, tanneries, fulling (or walk) mills and paper mills flourishing all along the river Cousin.



In 1847, the civil engineer Eugène Belgrand solves one of the town's main recurring problems : clean water supply. He brings running water to the town centre by building an aqueduct over the river Cousin. His achievements in Avallon are noticed by Baron Haussmann who asks him to provide clean water to Paris and assigns him the sewer project. Three years after being defeated by the Prussians, Avallon rises from its ordeal and inaugurates a statue dedicated to Vauban on the Grand Cours square, created by Bartholdi, famous for the New York Statue of Liberty. Celebrations are widespread as the inauguration coincides with the arrival of the railway in Avallon. In the 20th century, even though two world wars have left their scars, Avallon undergoes economic expansion, and proudly promotes its touristic, rural and heritage assets.

### COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SAINT-LAZARE

Classed as a Historical Monument, its origins go back to the 8th century. Its name comes from a gift made by Henri le Grand, Duc of Burgundy, a bone of the skull of Saint-Ladre (or Saint-Lazare) - considered to be the healer of leprosy.

The church undergoes many changes over the centuries : Originally built with three doorways, only two exist today. In 1589, lightning strikes and melts the church bells. Twelve years later, a storm blows down the stone bell towers and then, in 1633, the tower and the rebuilt bell tower are blown down by a hurricane, and in their fall take part of the church vault structure and one of its doorways with it. But you can still see the twenty four elders of the Apocalypse of Saint-John, the labours of the months and the zodiac signs that have been well preserved on the tympanum of the central doorway. As you enter the church, you will notice that it is composed of a central nave with two colateral aisles. Notice the height difference between the nave at the entrance and the choir; almost three meters lower.

An organ is added in 1850 and is then modified in 1890. Unfortunately, the passing of time has not spared the church and its organ which are waiting to be restored (very soon).



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