

Saint-Pol-de-Léon

Kastell-Paol



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Saint Pol de Léon with its 7500 inhabitants is indisputably one of the most delightful and picturesque towns in Brittany. Located on the coast of the North Finistère, it presents a charming haven, very popular in the summer.

Open to the sea, Saint Pol de Léon also is one of the towns in Brittany which possesses the most prominent religious features. Cathedral town until the French revolution, she has kept a unique architecture, namely a XIII century cathedral and an 80 meters high chapel which is the highest in Brittany. St Pol de Léon also is a town firmly turned towards the future. First vegetables producer and market garden of Brittany, it exports tens of thousands of vegetables to the whole of Europe every year.

1 - TOWNHALL

In the XVIII century, the bishops of the Léon have deeply marked the architectural image of their town. Built in 1706 by his eminence Mgr de la Bourdonnaye, the new Episcopal palace, these days the town hall, was extended in 1750. In the town hall there is a beautiful monumental staircase ornamented with some paintings from the Louvres museum. Ask to see a painting, in one of the rooms, by Yan Dargent called "Fillette Léonarde".

2 - MAISON PREBENDALE

The building called "maison prébendale" located at the east of the "Petit-Cloître" was built around 1530 and is the work of Olivier Richard, canon of Léon and Nantes, counsellor at the Parliament of Brittany, vicar-general of the bishop of Nantes. It is called "prébendale" because Olivier Richard was a canon, he was entitled to ecclesiastical incomes also known as prebends.





3 - SAINT-JOSEPH CHAPEL

The St Joseph chapel was built in 1846 to serve as a place of worship for the adjoining newly opened retirement home giving lodging to the elderly priests of the diocese. The church tower, 33m high, comes from the former Ursulines convent founded in 1630.

4 - SAINT-PIERRE CHAPEL

Formerly a parish church, the Saint-Pierre chapel which towers above the cemetery boasts a XV century nave. Designed originally in the shape of a Latin cross, its two wings were removed in the XVII century. To be admired, among the statues, is the Virgin with the baby Jesus dating from around the end of the XIV century and the beginning of the XV century. On the walls of the parish enclosure located in the cemetery 9 reliquaries with arcatures from the XVI century are also worth a visit The skulls of the dead were laid down there whereas the other bones were interned into the communal grave.

5 - NOTRE-DAME DU KREISKER CHAPEL

With its 78 meters rising up in the sky, the church tower of the chapel Notre Dame du Kreisker is the highest in Brittany. The origin of the chapel goes back to the VI century. A young linen maid who had worked on a holiday in the honour of the Virgin, despite Saint Kirec disapproval became suddenly completely paralysed. After her repentance the Saint healed her and she gave him her house to be converted into a chapel. The chapel was called "Kreis-Ker" because it was located in the middle of a village, in the inner suburb of St Pol de Léon. It is likely that the first chapel was made of wood and it must not have withstood the ravages of the Normans in the IX century. The tradition related that the English after having burnt the town in 1375, have rebuilt the Kreisker. Some architectural features such as the "perpendicular style" at the base of the tower are the obvious sign of an influence from across the Channel.

Settled on a long-term basis in St Pol de Léon after the war of succession of Brittany, the English could, indeed, convert the tower into a look-out post turned towards the sea and the surrounding countryside.

A guard room in the north porch is a virtually intact example of a conventional accommodation at the end of the XIV century. In the XV century, after the departure of the English, the tower was crowned by a superb spire and the edifice was slightly modified.

The tower rests on 4 pillars each side of a height of 3.20 m. When comparing the light-weight of the pillars to the height of the tower they support, one can hardly understand that this massive structure stands on apparently such a weak foundation.

Magnificent specimen of "clocher à jour" the granit spire is an octagon pierced by 80 openings which do not let the wind buffet it.

From the balustrade that can be accessed by a staircase of 169 steps, one can enjoy a splendid and awesome panorama. The church tower can be accessed in July and August.

6 - FORMER SEMINARY

The former large seminary of Léon which shelters a private secondary school was built in 1708.

7 - THE PILLORY HOUSE

This house built in 1680 is topped by a roof with 2 half croups which evokes an old parcel of land. The reunion of two plots of land had enabled the building of a double house. The street it (overhangs?) sheltered in the past a covered market.

8 - KERMENGUY HOTEL

This neat and homogeneous construction, bears witness to the quality that a private building could reach at the beginning of the XVII century. The corner watchtower reminds us of those of Roscoff.

9 - FORMER TOWNHALL

Erected during the first half of the XVII century, this house became, around 1640, the "Maison de Ville" ancestor of the town hall.

10 - FONTEIN LENN AR GLOAR

Located rue Poullou, near a washing place that it supplies, the "Lenn ar Gloar" fountain shelters an antique statue of the Virgin. It is said to have been blessed by St Paul Aurélien on his arrival in the town in the VI century. Its spring never ran dry even during spells of intensive drought. It was listed 'Monument Historique' in 1909.

11 - KEROULAS MANOR

This magnificent building, started around 1520, was commissioned by canon Hamon Barbier from Kerjean manor house.

12 - CATHEDRAL BASILICA

The cathedral (XIII and XVI century) is dedicated to Paul Aurélien, first bishop of Léon in the XV century. Since 1901, the cathedral also is "Basilique Mineure de l'Annonciation". Built on the site of an ancient Roman church, some vestiges of which still exist. This great monument has been constructed in several stages. The nave made of stone of Caen. The western façade and the south porch date back from the XIII century whereas the choir and the transept are from the beginning of the XV century. The cathedral was completed in the second half of the XVI century.

Beyond its great architectural significance, the cathedral shelters a multitude of unusual artistic curiosities. Below is a brief overview of seven distinctive features which are of course only a few amongst the architectural richness of the edifice.

- The XVI century oak stall.
- The relics, amongst them Paul Aurélien Celtic bell, one of the oldest Carolingian bell in Brittany and, in a crystal tube, a thorn from the Christ crown.
- 32 boxes containing skulls, a reminder of the custom in use until the XIX century, which consisted in exhuming the skeletons after five years in order to make room to the new deceased. The bones were carefully laid down in the charnel house and the skulls were locked up in small pierced boxes and they were then handed over to the families.





- The (tomb)stone of Marie-Amice Picard, where is buried one of the most extraordinary figures of the history of mysticism. She died in 1652, and in her days, she has attracted the attention of the greatest European minds. She remained 17 years without taking any food, she suffered the martyrdom of the Saint of the day.
- The great organ in the cathedral built between 1657 and 1660 by the English Robert and Thomas Dallam. It is composed of 2118 pipes and it is listed.
- A roman sarcophagus which is thought to be the sepulture of Conan Mériadec, first Christian king of Brittany, who died in 421.
- The ciborium containing the Holy Eucharist. It is located above the former high altar, it has the shape of a palm tree symbolizing the eternity and the resurrection. There are three similar ciboriums in France, in Amiens, in Reims and in Saint-Germain.

THE COAST AND THE BEACHES

Scattered over 13 kilometres of coast line, some of the beaches, creeks and strands of St Pol de Léon have names of pieces of poetry :

"Tahiti", le "Petit-Nice", "Sainte-Anne"... The walker discovers them from the panoramic viewpoint of the "Champ de la Rive" municipal park, which is overhung by a mission cross erected in 1901. The panorama is grandiose and most certainly one of the most exceptional in the North-Finistère : the panoramic view embraces many features. The Sainte-Anne islet a listed natural site and hermitage of the White Friars until the 18 century, the gigantic rock on the site, was once armed with powerful cannons. The "Château du Taureau" built by Francois 1er and fortified by Vauban; the wild rocks of Primel; the coast of Lannion and the harmonious group of islands called the "Sept-Iles".



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