



Kevin Bonnaud is hiEurope's France correspondent. He reports on new and unknown places for you to discover.

500 Years of Renaissance

By Kevin Bonnaud

Summer will be more festive than usual in the Loire Valley. Cradle of the French Renaissance, the region marks the 500th anniversary of both the (start of) the construction of Chambord and the death of Leonardo da Vinci.

Chambord Utopias, Past and Future

To celebrate its 500th anniversary, the Chateau de Chambord brings visitors back to the origins of the castle in its largest exhibition ever. "Tourists learn about the artistic, cultural and political enabling context of the French Renaissance -highlighting ideal cities-the construction, the influence of Italian architects, King Francis I and Leonardo da Vinci whose role remains a mystery", says Yannick Mercoyrol, Cultural Programming Manager. 150 works of art are displayed: illuminated manuscripts from the 9th to 16th centuries, treaties of architecture, a lion armor, a portrait of the monarch by Titian not mentioning 3 original worksheets from da Vinci's Codex Atlanticus.

Because Chambord was about utopias, the exhibition is also looking to the future. About 20 international schools of architecture worked on contemporary projects as if they had to redesign a 21st century version of Chambord. "We want to show that a monumental building like the Chateau de Chambord is not stuck in the past and can still be subject to speculation", Yannick Mercoyrol explains.

Green Utopia

With the restoration of the vegetable gardens, Chambord turns today's green utopia into reality. Parts of the stables have recently been transformed into a 1000m² parcel to cultivate old and local varieties of vegetables, fruits, aromatic and medicinal plants and edible flowers. Enough to feed the 200 employees working in the estate.

"The whole concept is to recreate a harmonious, resilient, forest-like ecosystem with herbal products such as comfrey, nettles, manure, decoctions, garlic, savory and oregano infusions where plants help each other", says Baptiste Saulnier, the head gardener overseeing the project. A former field hockey professional and



restaurant owner, he broke with his former Parisian life, trained and became an expert himself. Gourmet and starred restaurants in the area and in Paris, including the Elysée Palace, have shown interest. Tourists will be able to taste the products in restaurants within the estate or fill their basket.

The Myth of Leonardo

50 km east of Chambord, Amboise is a top destination to celebrate the legacy of Leonardo da Vinci. The Italian master spent the last three years of his life here. The royal Chateau, overseeing the town and Loire river must be your first stop. This is where Leonardo da Vinci was presented to the court in 1516 and where his grave and presumed body lies.

To mark the 500th anniversary of his death, the royal castle presents an exhibition featuring the monumental painting, "The Death of Leonardo da Vinci in the Arms of Francis I" (1781) by François-Guillaume Menageot. Praised at the time, the work of art is based on a historic mistake though. The King was in Fontainebleau when the event occurred. The exhibition shows how influential the painting was. Visitors see the work of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres where Francis I is center stage. "The purpose is to show how the French monarchy helped build the myth of Leonardo by depicting an everlasting genuine

friendship between Europe's most powerful leader, patron of arts, and one of the greatest artists in history," says Communication Manager Irina Metzl.

The story was spread first by Giorgio Vasari in his biography "The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects." The original version of his manuscript is on display. The castle also has a contemporary approach to the painting featuring graffiti artist Andrea Ravo Mattoni. Expert in re-interpreting classic masterpieces on big walls, he created 5 large canvases based on details of Menageot's work.

Da Vinci's Last Supper

This trip would not be complete without the Clos Lucé castle, where da Vinci lived (and died). A 15 min walk from the Château Royal, after visiting the manor, wandering in the park between the inventions of the Italian genius, you should go to the renovated Eiffel style building facility, home of an unprecedented exhibition. Here, the 5m x 9m tapestry The Last Supper is displayed outside of the Vatican Museums for the first time. "Tourists can admire the restored replica of the monumental fresco made by Leonardo da Vinci in the late 15th century, which was discovered in Milan's Santa Maria delle Grazie church," says communication manager Irina Metzl. The tapestry, probably made in Flanders between 1516 and 1524, has royal crests, purple velvet frames and Renaissance architectures. Gold, silver and silk threads translate the diverse tones and chiaroscuro effects perfectly. "We clearly see the footprint of Leonardo from notes to drawings and landscape sketches," Metzl points out. Commissioned by Francis I and his mother Louise of Savoy, the masterpiece was given to Pope Clement VII in 1533 following the wedding between his daughter Catherine de' Medici and King Henri II of France.

Tips

Le Relais de Chambord

Le Relais de Chambord 4-star hotel is a unique place for people visiting the Loire Valley. As the only accommodation available within the Estate of Chambord, the newly restored hotel has 55 chic and contemporary rooms (and suites) offering unmatched views on either the castle, located just 50 meters away, or the charming Cosson river. Customers can enjoy a boat tour and explore the largest enclosed forest park in Europe when tourists are gone. Guests can also experience the French art de vivre and taste local fine products in the restaurant or go to the spa to relax a bit.

relaisdechambord.com/en/

For planned events honoring Leonardo da Vinci and the French Renaissance this summer, check out the full schedule at <https://www.vivadavinci2019.fr/en/>

