

Visit St-Hilaire-du- Harcouët



Crédit photo : ©OTSMN_Jimmy-Perrotte



Wheelchair-friendly circuit



Starting point: Place de la Motte



Distance : 700 m

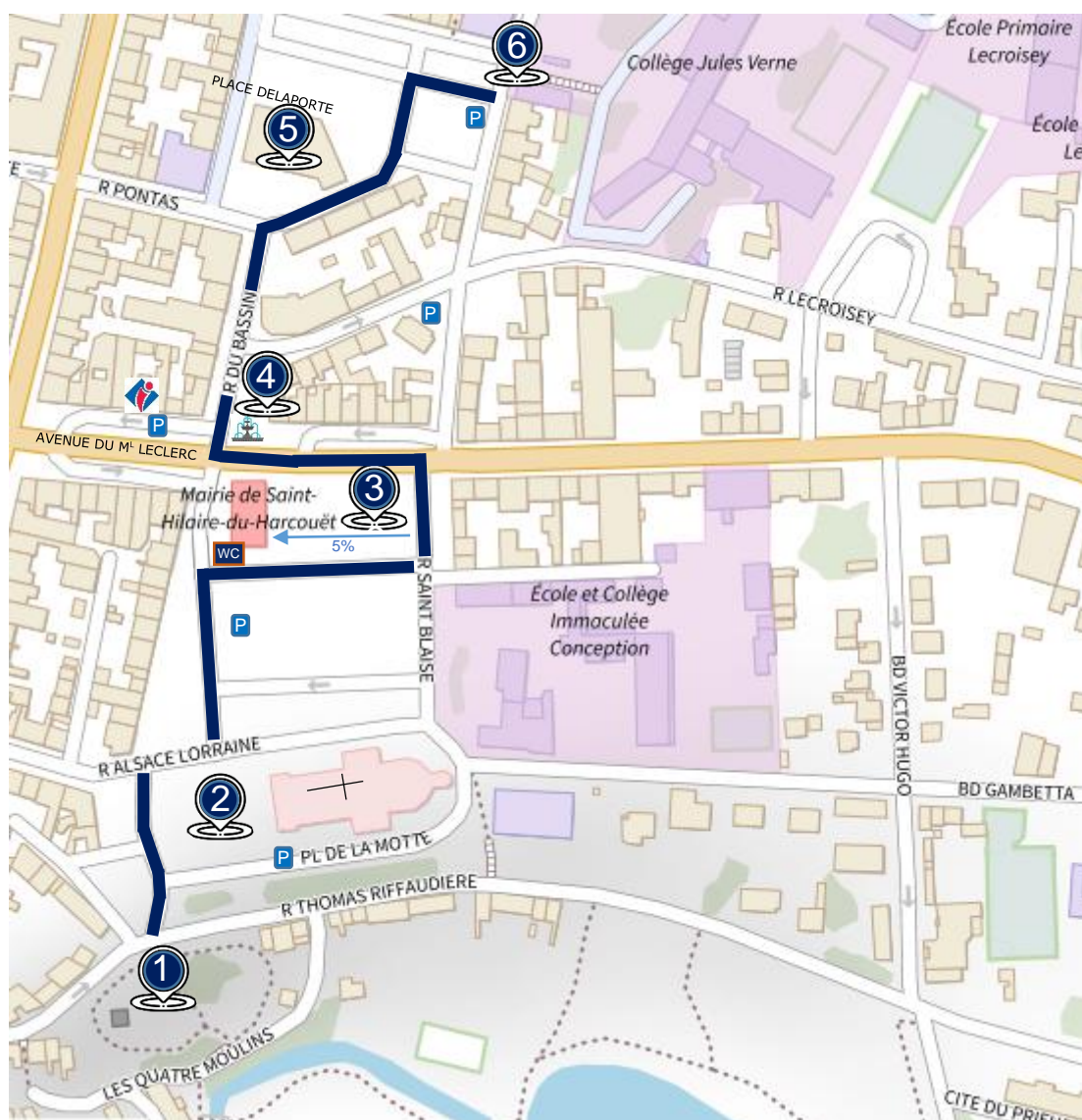





02 33 79 38 88



tourisme.sthilaireduharcouet@msm-normandie.fr

Office de Tourisme Mont Saint-Michel - Normandie
Bureau de St Hilaire-du-Harcouët
21 avenue du Maréchal Leclerc
50600 Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët

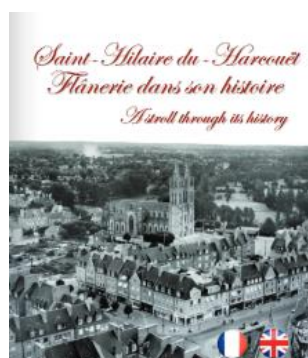


 Accessible toilets
  Disabled parking spaces
  Tourist Office

Starting point: Church parking lot (Place de la Motte)

To complete your visit, you can download or request the following document from the Tourist Office

*Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët,
A stroll through history*



Let's begin the visit...

The birth of a town in the 11th century: Place de la Motte

The founding of the town is closely linked to William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, and his victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, which made him King of England. His half-brother Robert, Count of Mortain, appointed Harsculphe, one of his companions in the conquest, as lord of the town that would later become Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët.

At that time, only a hamlet and a priory existed. A church dedicated to Saint Hilaire was built. This church and its first lord gave the town its name: Saint-Hilaire-de-Harsculphe or Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët.

The first castle was built on this site, of which only the name of the square "La Motte" remains today.

It was modified many times. The last castle of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët dated from the 17th century. It was demolished in the 19th century to make way for the construction of the current church.



The Tower of the Former Church and Arnaud Beltrame Square



©OTMS/MN

The Tower of the Former Church, affectionately called the "Old Tower" by locals, is the oldest building in the town.

On the west side, a granite band bears the inscription *M.IIIle IIII xx XV*, which corresponds to the year 1495.

In the 19th century, the old church was replaced by a new one. Only the original tower was preserved, mainly to keep its bells. It has been listed as a Historic Monument since 1921.



©Mairie de Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët

Its walls are adorned with frescoes painted by Marthe Flandrin in 1947.

The tower houses the parish baptistery. Restored in 2020, it is open to visitors during guided tours or on Heritage Days.



Saint-Hilaire Church: A church in place of the castle

Accessible entrance via Rue Thomas Riffaudière, on the right side of the church when facing it. If you have difficulty opening the door and are accompanied, the accessible entrance can be opened from inside the church.

Built on the site of the former castle, Saint-Hilaire Church was constructed between 1846 and 1893. It was the initiative of the town's priest, Canon Carnet, who noted in the early 19th century that the existing church was too small for his parish. He wished to build a larger one in the then-popular neo-Gothic style.

The church, with its impressive dimensions, was designed by architect Nicolas Théberge from Avranches. Many visitors mistake it for a cathedral (the actual bishopric is in Coutances).



[Did you know? A cathedral is a church that houses the cathedra—the bishop's seat. So, it is not the size or the façade that makes a church a cathedral, but the presence of a bishop.]

Following the bombings of summer 1944, the church caught fire. Its roof and interior decoration were destroyed. Reconstruction work, overseen by Henri Delaage, began in 1945 and was completed twenty years later.



Town Hall



Practical information:

Access to the Town Hall is via Rue Saint-Blaise, with a 5% incline over 60 meters.



The Town Hall, inaugurated on October 17th, 1965, marked the completion of the post-war Reconstruction efforts. It was designed by architect Eugène Holas.

On the first floor, in the ceremonial hall (accessible by elevator), a painting by Marin-Marie, official painter of the French Navy, is on display. The artwork was

custom-made by the artist, who divided his time between Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët and the Chausey Islands.

The ceremonial hall is open during town hall opening hours and can also be visited upon request at the reception desk.

Contact: +33 (0)2.33.79.38.70



The basin

The basin is one of the city's iconic monuments. Installed in 1829 at the crossroads of Place Nationale, it provided residents with access to water. It was surrounded by chains to prevent people from washing their clothes or letting their horses drink from it.



Place Delaporte: The Reconstruction

During the summer, amid the battles for Liberation, the town of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët was bombed twice and 80% of it was destroyed. The residents quickly organized to clear the streets and ruins, allowing life to resume.

The official reconstruction of the town began on May 1st, 1948, with the laying of the first stone. The urban planning project, led by the Danger firm and architect Henri Delaage, opened the town to modernity while ensuring its commercial development. Among these achievements, Place Delaporte became the site of the weekly Wednesday market. Since 2022, new covered market halls have complemented the square.

Before 1944, the weekly market was held at the central crossroads, where two major traffic routes intersected: the road connecting Bayeux to Nantes (rue de Mortain and rue Waldeck Rousseau) and the one linking Paris to Brest (rue de Paris and rue de la République). Thanks to these roadways, the town developed its trade, fairs, and markets, which remain its strength today.

The basin was installed in the middle of the crossroads.



The Coats of Arms of Saint-Hilaire



Since 1858, the town had a red coat of arms featuring a silver tower topped with three golden stars. This design combined the arms of the first lords of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët, the Harcouët family (represented by the three golden stars), and the last lords, the Du Bourblanc family (represented by the castle). The coat of arms was created by the mayor at the time, Hyppolite Bréhier.



In 1944, Dr. Daniel Cuche, acting as interim mayor, designed a new coat of arms to anchor the town of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët in history. It featured the eagle of Bertrand Du Guesclin, a defender of France during the Hundred Years' War, whose mother was originally from Saint-Hilaire ("half from his mother's side"), along with symbols from two local families:

the Harcouët (stars) and the Malmains (from whom Du Guesclin's grandmother descended). This coat of arms was used from 1944 to 1959. It can still be seen at the entrance of Collège Jules Verne.



Coat of arms
in front of the school

In 1959, the Cuche administration ended and Claude Cheval took office. As the eagle in the coat of arms too closely resembled that of Germany, the decision was made to return to Hyppolite Bréhier's 1858 design.

The Cuche coat of arms can still be found in several places around town: on the entrance wall of Collège Jules Verne, on some street signs installed between 1944 and 1959, especially in the town center, such as rue des Écoles, rue de Paris (at the intersection with rue des Écoles and rue Saint-Blaise), and rue du Château (at the intersection with rue d'Alsace Lorraine).

Continue your visit...

Some sites are a bit further from the town center or located on steep streets. If you wish to continue exploring the town, we invite you to head directly to the locations listed below.



○ The Rex Cinema

Address: 30 rue Waldeck Rousseau. Parking: 1 parking space available in front of the cinema (on a steep street).

Following the French defeat against Nazi Germany in June 1940, German soldiers and officers entered the town and established the Kommandantur in the Town Hall. The proximity of the Post Office (28 rue Waldeck Rousseau) facilitated communications.

On Wednesday, June 14, 1944, at 8:15 p.m., the town was bombed twice within fifteen minutes by Allied aircraft. Their objective was to open the way for the Liberation toward Avranches and Paris. The Town Hall was partially destroyed.

During the town's reconstruction, the Town Hall was rebuilt near the church, and a cinema-theater replaced the former building. It was inaugurated on March 16, 1966.



○ La Verrière [Site currently closed for renovation]

Address: 35 boulevard Gambetta

The cultural center La Verrière is housed in the former convent of the Clarisses. The nuns settled there in 1919, in a former bourgeois residence called "Ker Maria". They undertook renovation work to expand the building, adding cells, a dormitory, and a chapel. The monastery was completed in 1933. In 1990, the nuns joined the community in Rennes.

○ The Prieuré ponds

Address: Le Prieuré. Recommended parking: follow the signs for "Plans d'eau du Prieuré" from Boulevard de Savigny

The Prieuré ponds were created in 1994. They are fed by the Airon, a tributary of the Sélune, which flows below.

Before the town was founded in 1083, men and women settled along the banks of the Airon, in a place known as L'Aumondais. These early inhabitants established the Priory of Sainte-Marie and Saint-Benoît, which is mentioned in the town's founding charter. Although the priory no longer exists, its name lives on through the Prieuré ponds.

Today, the Prieuré ponds are a leisure and walking area for visitors, and many of the town's events are held there, such as the July 14th celebrations. The walk is accessible to wheelchair users. Access is via a path that passes between two rocks, with a 90 cm gap between them.

