

Discover the town of Avranches, home of the Mont Saint-Michel manuscripts

Nestled on a rocky outcrop, in the heart of a lush green setting, Avranches stands close to Mont Saint-Michel and watches over its bay.

Its strategic position has earned Avranches a past that's both rich and turbulent. Even before the Roman conquest, the Abrincates (the "warriors of the estuaries") occupied the region and made this promontory a sacred place of interaction. Avranches became the Gallo-Roman capital, suffered the first Saxon incursions in 286 and won over the Franks, who settled here in 786. It supported

the constitution of the Duchy of Normandy (one of its viscounts followed William the Conqueror to England), but experienced English occupation during the Hundred Years War. It suffered a defeat against the Protestants during the Wars of Religion and the declassification of its fortifications in the 18th century, but its name remains attached to the "Breakthrough" which propelled the allied armies on the road to Liberation in 1944 under the command of General Patton... Avranches holds within it more than one treasure, starting with the priceless manuscripts of the abbey of Mont Saint-Michel, which a bishop from this town, Saint Aubert, was behind.

1 THE STATUE OF GENERAL VALHUBERT



General of the Empire born in Avranches in 1764, Jean-Marie Mellon Roger, known as "Valhubert", was killed at Austerlitz in 1805. A work in marble by sculptor Pierre Cartellier, this statue, commissioned by Napoleon I to adorn a Parisian square, was offered to the town of Avranches during the Restoration by Charles X (1828).

8 LILLE STREET

The street once bore the name "Rue des Prêtres" (Road of the Priests), as the homes of the canons and clerics revolving around the bishop and the cathedral were gathered there. It maintains its old character thanks to the north facade of the Grand Doynenné, the stained-glass window at No. 28, the powerful granite facade of No. 13 and the half-timbered walls at No. 7.

9 ENGBAULT STREET

After serving as a bourgeois arterial road, at the end of the 19th century, it became a less reputable place. Don't miss the carved window at the very top of this narrow cobbled street which has kept its old appearance and medieval name!



10 MAURICE CHEVREL STREET

At the crossroads of Rue de Geôle, Rue d'Auditoire and Rue Maurice Chevrel, the town offers a glimpse of a sample of its architecture: a half-timbered, corbelled house from the 16th century, a bourgeois residence from the 18th and a set of Reconstruction houses (concrete window lintels).

11 THE BERGEVIN HOUSE

Next to the old mansion built in the 18th century that now houses the Museums and Heritage Department, the garden overlooks the walls of the old town. You can see an outbuilding in which painter Albert Bergevin set up his studio. An iconic figure in Avranches, he was behind the rebirth of the Museum of Art and History in the 1960s.



12 THE REMAINS OF THE DUNGEON

The old Château d'Avranches, possibly built around 950, is one of the oldest medieval fortifications in Normandy. Seat of the Viscount of Avranches, it was gradually abandoned and decommissioned in the 18th century. The opening up of Rue de la Belle Andrine in 1848 ripped it apart, and it collapsed in 1883. Only sections of the wall remain on either side of the road. At the top of the crenellated curtain wall built in the 13th century and then rebuilt in the 20th, enjoy a view of the bay and valley of the Sée, as well as Avranches's various neighbourhoods.



13 THE ARSENAL TOWER

It witnesses the will of King of France Louis IX (Saint Louis) to strengthen the town's defences in the 13th century, shortly after Normandy became part of the royal domain (1204). The stone cannonballs which adorn it today date from the Siege of the League during the Wars of Religion (16th century).

14 ESTOUTEVILLE SQUARE

On the site of the old defensive ditches, along the double ramparts, the tree-lined «Place du Promenoir» became the pig and sheep market in the 19th century. It was also, unfortunately, the scene of the repression of the Barefoot Revolt of 1639. Fearing the calling into question of the privilege of "quart-bouilion" (reduced tax on salt), the Norman salt workers revolted against royal power. The leaders were arrested and executed on this square, but they had won: the tax was never increased!

15 THE SCRIPTORIAL

From the origins of the Mont to the stages in the making of an illuminated book, the Scriptorial prepares its visitors to discover the precious manuscripts of Mont Saint-Michel Abbey. Temporary exhibitions and events throughout the year complete this astonishing journey to the heart of the written word.



A quick 1-hour tip

Got just an hour to visit Avranches? What are the things you really shouldn't miss? The Tourist Office has selected its "essentials" - all you need to do is locate the symbol in the list of places below and let yourself be guided.

16 MARKETPLACE



The large market halls (today the headquarters of the town's social services), built in 1844 by architect François Cheftel, watch over the market every Saturday morning, as well as the half-timbered house from the 15th century known as the Maison des Trois Marchands (House of the Three Merchants) or Maison de la Sirène (Mermaid House).

17 THE ST-GERVAIS-ET-ST-PROTAIS BASILICA

Built in the heart of the ancient and then medieval town, it acquired its neoclassical aspect with a series of works in the 19th century, which ended with the raising of the tower. It houses the Saint-Gervais Treasury with in particular its reliquary containing the supposed skull of Saint Aubert, Bishop of Avranches, who was behind the first sanctuary built on Mont Saint-Michel in the 8th century.



18 THE CHURCH OF SAINT-SATURNIN

It was rebuilt in the 19th century but is of ancient origin: like the basilica and cathedral, it holds the relics of a saint at the time of the Christianisation of the region (4-5th centuries). Moreover, traces of a Merovingian necropolis surround it (6-7th centuries).

19 CHURCH OF NOTRE-DAME-DES-CHAMPS

Often mistaken for the town's cathedral, Notre-Dame-des-Champs was originally a modest parish church. It was considerably enlarged from 1863, in a neo-Gothic style favoured by architect Nicolas Théberge, as evidenced by the fanciful gargoyles that adorn its sides. Its construction, delayed by World War I, was barely completed in 1937 before suffering damage in the bombardments of 1944.



20 JARDIN DES PLANTES (PLANT GARDEN)

This former kitchen garden of the Capuchin monks was given to the Ecole Centrale after the Revolution: different botanists and labelled flowers and species there. Various notable points mark out this pastoral walk: sculpture, Romanesque portal of the Saint-Georges-de-Bouillé chapel and portal of the former Capuchin convent, Ursuline cemetery, monument in tribute to the Resistance fighter Désiré Lerouxel, giant sequoia and ginkgo biloba... As for the belvedere, it offers a unique view of the bay.



21 SAINTE-ANNE DE MOUTONS ABBEY

Founded in the 1630s, after the nuns were driven out during the Revolution, the abbey became a barracks, school, psychiatric hospital, theatre, cinema... Today, its two arcaded galleries, which once enclosed a cloister, are home to the Intercommunal Cultural Centre.

22 PATTON SQUARE



The monument in honour of General Patton and his 4th Armoured Division was erected in 1954 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Liberation of Avranches on 31 July 1944. Even today, the Breakthrough at Avranches holds an important place in the collective memory of Normandy.

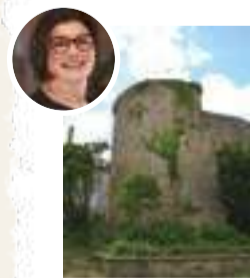
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— "Nature in the city" tour — Circuit "Second World War" — Circuit "Historic Avranches" — Stairs

Ideas for a discovery walk

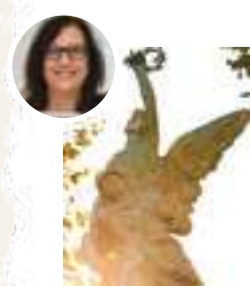
Experts in the area, living and/or working in Avranches for many years at the Tourist Office, Sandra, Héléne, Isabelle and Pauline provide their insightful advice to discover the town on foot under different themes.



Sandra was born, raised and lives in Avranches. The town and its people hold no secrets for her. She can talk on the subject for hours and so offers the "Historic Avranches" tour: discovering the history of Avranches summed up in just a few streets. A stroll through the town's history, architecture, heritage and must-see places.



Héléne suggests "going green in town": nature in Avranches is present everywhere. A great way to discover remarkable trees, fragrant flowers, birdsong and nature-filled parks where it's good to have a sit down.



Isabelle recommends "a memorial tour of the Second World War": the town of Avranches witnessed many historical episodes during the Second World War. The bombed-out town managed to rebuild itself but still retains some scars from this sad chapter in the history of the 20th century.



Pauline invites you to discover the best viewpoints to photograph and share on social networks

Out of the ordinary: sometimes during a walk, there are details that may escape you. Track down anything "out of the ordinary" by looking up, down and around you... Keep an eye open for the smallest detail - you'll be surprised by all these curiosities.

Viewpoint: Avranches is located on a rocky outcrop, with lots of views over the bay and surrounding countryside. See if you can spot them while walking and enjoy (quite simply)!

Instagram: discover places identified as Instagrammable, although there are lots of others to find yourself; take a picture of it (or photograph yourself with it - even better) and share on Instagram with #Avranches and #Montsaintmichelnormandie.



Time Travel

A fun, free app to discover the town's history during the Second World War. With your tablet or smartphone, take up the missions entrusted to you and immerse yourself in the heart of the Second World War through the destiny of a character that you will play.

Available on IOS and Android.

Mont Saint-Michel: the town of Avranches is closely linked to Mont Saint-Michel: by its history, its geographical position, and its heritage. There are numerous panoramas over the bay and Mont Saint-Michel - can you find them?

1 The remarkable garden of Chantore: nature in poetry



If paradise on earth were to take the form of a garden, it would undoubtedly be the one that surrounds Château de Chantore in Bacilly. As soon as you arrive, you'll be impressed by this avenue of trees, whose perspective leads to the magnificent 18th-century château in its pink tones. Walk through the 19-hectare landscaped park where ancient exotic trees, camellia and rhododendron beds, bamboo jungles, an English river, waterfalls, ponds, swans, peacocks and a mysterious tower are all to be found. This place is classified among the most beautiful gardens in Normandy, and you'll understand why as you make your way around it.

2 Become a "miquelot" (Mont Saint-Michel walker) and cross the bay

Crossing the bay, hiking through the strands with a guide, is inspired by the thousand-year-old custom of pilgrims who went to Mont Saint-Michel on foot. Now, this nature outing is accessible to anyone wishing to enjoy an unforgettable experience. The packages offered by the certified guides are varied, from simply discovering the shifting sands (1hr30), the tour of the Mont (2hr), from Mont Saint-Michel to the islet of Tombelaine (3hr) to the return trip crossing of 13 km (6hr) from Genêts.



3 Ferme des Cara-Meuh, a family farm to delight your taste buds



A few kilometres from Avranches, in Vains, Ferme des Cara-Meuh welcomes gourmets young and old. On this family dairy farm, you can learn how to make cow's milk caramels, taste the famous "Cara-Meuh", "Comfiné" and "La Meuhle" cheeses. Visit the farm which offers events and exhibitions all year round. You'll never get bored!

4 The bay's ecomuseum, a fount of knowledge on the bay of Mont Saint-Michel



Is it raining? Is the weather nice? Would you like to know? Would you like to learn more about the landscapes of the bay? The Tourist Office has the answer:

visit the ecomuseum of the bay at Vains Saint-Léonard, just next to Pointe du Grouin du Sud. Set in an old farm, discover the formation and evolution, its fauna, its flora, as well as past and present human activities here. You can even learn how to make your own salt in the workshops.

5 Discover the feeding ground of the salt meadow sheep



The salt meadows are, above all, these meadows covered by the sea during high tidal coefficients. This characteristic of the salt marshes allows the breeding of sheep and gives their meat an unequalled taste. It's thanks to the so-called halophyte

vegetation, because it's adapted to the salinity of the soil, that the sheep that feed on it gain this particular taste character. This meat doesn't have a very strong salty taste, but its flavour is recognised as finer than classic country lamb.

6 The tidal bore a spectacle that's like a wave to the soul

But what is a "tidal bore"? A natural, magical phenomenon, a tidal bore is a wave that forms when the sea rises during spring tides (high tides, coefficient greater than 99). The rising tide can be more or less impressive depending on the weather conditions.



You can observe it in several places such as Mont Saint-Michel (2hr before), Roche Torin (1hr30), Pointe du Grouin du Sud (1hr30) or even Pontaubault (30 min) and Gué de l'Épine (30 min) as it heads upstream. Spot the symbols on the map and plan to be there between 2 hours and 30 minutes before high tide time to marvel at the spectacle.

7 The aerodrome and its flying activities, or how to get up high above the bay

Like a bird, fly over Mont Saint-Michel and its bay aboard a microlight or plane from the Val-Saint-Père aerodrome. In this infinite sky with its harmonious colours, discover the beauty of the sea, the meandering rivers, the undulating sand, the dunes, polders and Mont Saint-Michel itself, which stands proud in the midst of this immensity; a grand spectacle you'll never forget!



8 Pontaubault, a surviving village with historic charms



This town on the banks of the Sélune is discreet and yet has tourist potential that's hard to underestimate. Pontaubault made history during World War II by witnessing clashes and acts of heroism. Thanks to an Alsatian, François Mutshler, who was forcibly recruited into the German army, the village avoided the execution of many of its inhabitants. A plaque commemorates this act of bravery. Also take a moment to contemplate this bridge which allowed many American divisions to reach Brittany to liberate it. Then visit the typical post-war reconstruction church. And finally, take the green way by bike that passes through the village, runs along the river and takes you to Mont Saint-Michel.

9 I hike, you walk, he/she strolls, we wander...

Here, around Avranches, hikers are kings. No less than 2 GRs (long-distance walking routes - the GR22 and GR223) pass through the region. Coming from Paris for one, circling the Channel for the other, they share the feature of both going to Mont Saint-Michel. At a place known as Gué de l'Épine, you can even walk along the Sélune River with its breathtaking view of the salt meadows and Mont Saint-Michel.



La Bourdonnière in Saint-Martin-des-Champs offers a perfect natural setting for family country walks. You can also download hiking trails from the Tourist Office website.

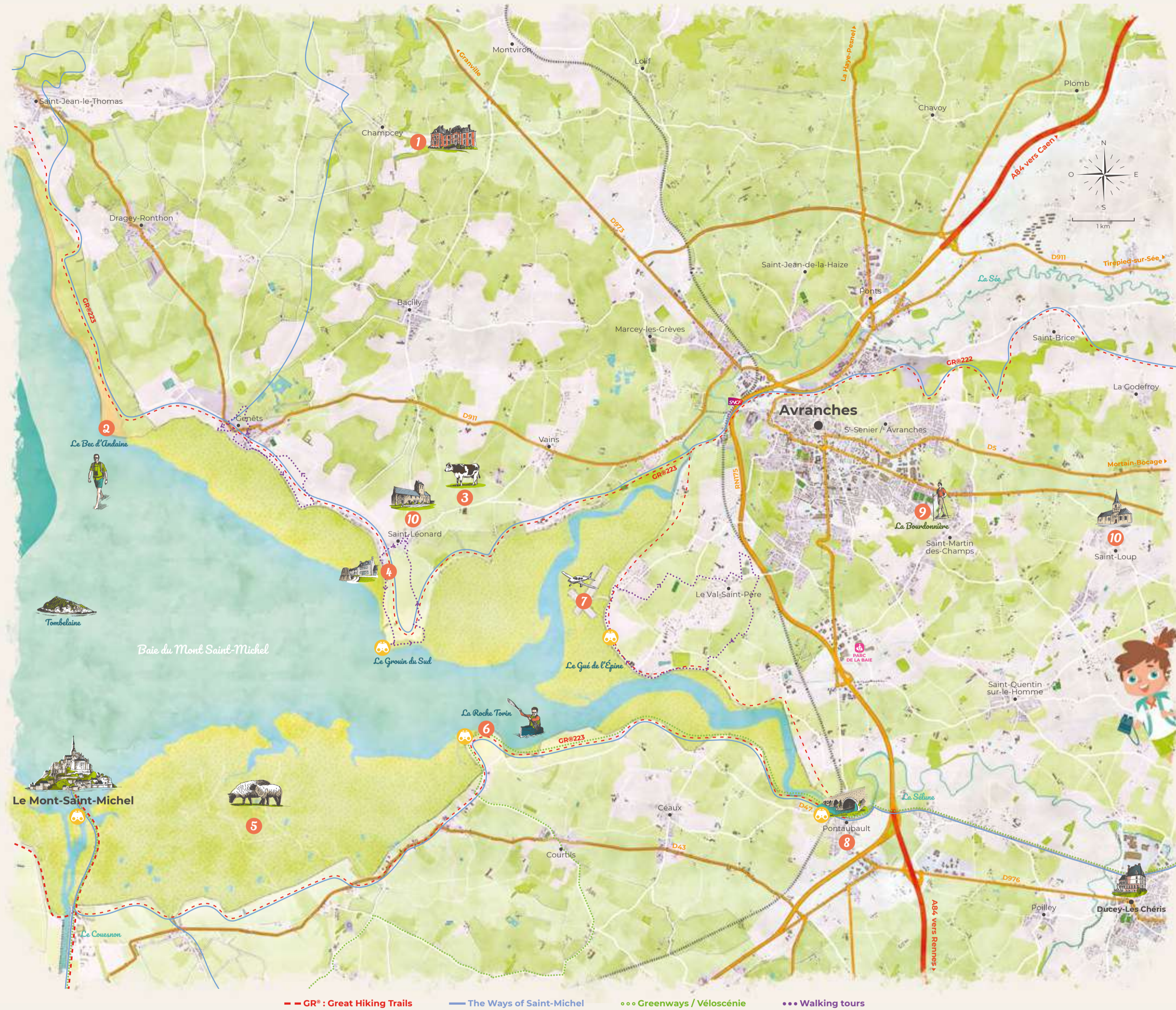
10 Discover the Romanesque art of churches in small villages

Present for centuries in the heart of the small villages along the Channel, the Romanesque churches are modest and make little fanfare. But, at the bend in an alley or enthroned in the centre of the village, they deserve your interest as their architecture is solid and majestic. Admire them, visit them, discover their unique features - they all have a story to tell.



The Church of Saint-Loup, a 12th-century Romanesque monument, was listed as a Historic Monument in 1921. Saint-Léonard's priory (Vains), built in the 12th century in Romanesque style in granite and schist, consists of a manor house and chapel.

How about discovering all around Avranches?



AVRANCHES VISITORS' GUIDE



www.ot-montsaintmichel.com

Tourist Office
Mont Saint-Michel – Normandie

AVRANCHES INFORMATION OFFICE

The Avranches Tourist Information Office is located in Avranches town centre and welcomes you all year round (except Sundays in low season, 25/12 and 01/01)

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Services:

- Map in 6 languages
- Ticket offices
- Transport tickets (SNCF – FlixBus)
- Souvenir shop
- Free WiFi
- Photocopying



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N° immatriculation: IM050160002 – N° Siret: 81756789400016

