

## Site Summary

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### Chateau de Fontainebleau

#### General Information

The Chateau de Fontainebleau, located 34 miles southeast of the center of Paris, has been a sovereign residence for eight centuries and is one of the largest French royal châteaux. It has been continuously served as a residence for the French monarchs from Louis VII to Napoleon III. Capétiens, Valois, Bourbons, Bonaparte and Orléans, all members of French ruling dynasties, have lived here before. Nowadays, it is a national museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

#### Medieval Period

- The earliest record of the Château de Fontainebleau in a royal charter dates back to 1137. The Château has developed around the Keep, showing the building's medieval origins. Its beautiful scenery with many springs in the surrounding forest provided an abundant activities for the French royal family and became a favorite residence and hunting lodge.
- The name 'Fontainebleau' originated from one of the springs, the fountain de Bliaud, located now in the English garden, next to the wing of Louis XV.
- In 1259, Saint Louis founded a monastery hospital at the edges of what is now the Main Courtyard (also known as the Cour du Cheval Blanc ) or the Cour des Adieux.
- Philip IV of France (1268-1314; the son of Philip III of France and Isabella of Aragon) was born and died at Fontainebleau.
- The keep contains the most visible remaining medieval feature including certain interior passageways and spiral staircases set.

#### The Renaissance

- In the 15th century, although there were some changes and embellishments made to the castle by Isabeau of Bavaria, the wife of King Charles VI, the medieval structure remained essentially intact until the reign Francis I (1494–1547).
- Because of the particular fondness of Francis I for the Château de Fontainebleau, he carried out a great amount of work on it and spent time there a lot. In terms of construction, he commissioned

the architect Gilles le Breton to build a palace in the new Renaissance style, recently imported from Italy.

- At the beginning of 1528, Francis constructed the Gallery Francis I and brought the Italian architect and painters to decorate the new gallery with murals glorifying the King. Together their style of decoration became known as the first School of Fontainebleau and this was the known as the first great decorated gallery built in France.
- From 24 to 30 December 1539, Fontainebleau was famously hosted by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.
- In about 1540, Francis began another major addition to the chateau by building a new park in Italian Renaissance garden style surrounding the chateau.
- After Francis I, King Henry II continued to expand the chateau by extending the East wing of the lower court and decorated it with the first famous horseshoe-shaped staircase.
- Following the death of Henry II, his widow, Catherine de' Medici, continued the construction and decoration of the château.

#### The 17th Century

- Henry IV carried out the last major building expansion works at the château, including building two pavilions, called Tiber and Luxembourg, remaking all facades around the courtyard, building the Porte du Baptistère and the Quartier, and an indoor tennis court, which was the largest such court existing in the world. Henry IV also created a park, laying out a 1200 meters long grand canal in it, sixty years before Louis XIV built his own grand canal at Versailles.
- A "second school of Fontainebleau" of painters and decorators went to work on the interiors.
- The first Bourbon king regularly visited the château, to which he added the new Cour des Offices and a grand entrance to the town, as well as numerous buildings. The canal was dug and new gardens designed and planted.

#### The 18th Century

- King Louis XIII completed the decoration of the chapel of the Trinity and reconstructed the horseshoe stairway.
- King Louis XIV showed more fondness to Fontainebleau and stayed there longer than any other monarch. Changes were largely aesthetic, mainly dealing with the interior design. He made few changes to the exterior of the château, but build a new apartment and made major changes in the

park and gardens. He destroyed the hanging garden built during the reign of Henry IV, and instead built a pavilion, designed by Le Vau.

- On May 19–20, 1717, during the Regency following the death of Louis XIV, the Russian Czar Peter the Great was a guest at Fontainebleau.
- Louis XV created more lodging for his enormous number of courtiers.
- King Louis XVI also made additions to the château to create more space for his courtiers.
- In 1725, the marriage ceremony of Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska was conducted in the Chapel of the Trinity at the Château de Fontainebleau.
- During the Age of Enlightenment, hunting parties continued to be held at Fontainebleau during the autumn with more relaxed etiquette than at Versailles.
- In 1724, a new theatre was built.

### The First Empire

- During the French Revolution, the Château did not suffer any significant damage, but all the furniture was sold at auction.
- At 1803, Napoleon I installed a military school there and chose Fontainebleau as the site for Pope Pius VII, who had traveled from Rome to crown Napoleon Emperor. Transformation and refurbishment were made to accommodate for the Pope. The gardens of Diane and the gardens of the Pines were replanted and turned into an English landscape garden.
- Although Napoleon's visits to Fontainebleau were not frequent, Napoleon was fond of it and refurbished it completely immediately after the Revolution.
- Napoleon spent the last days of his reign at Fontainebleau, before abdicating there on 4 April 1814. In his memoirs, written while in exile on Saint Helena, he recalled his time at Fontainebleau; "...the true residence of Kings, the house of the centuries. Perhaps it was not a rigorously architectural palace, but it was certainly a place of residence well thought out and perfectly suitable. It was certainly the most comfortable and happily situated palace in Europe."

### The Restoration

- Kings Louis XVIII and Charles X spent little time at Fontainebleau and neither made any major changes to the palace.

- On 30 May 1837, Ferdinand-Philippe, Duke of Orléans and oldest son of Louis-Philippe I, married Duchess Helena Luisa Elizabeth of Mecklenburg-Schwerin at Fontainebleau. The event gave rise to significant restoration work and conversion work.

### The Second Empire

- Emperor Napoleon III resumed the custom of long stays at Fontainebleau. Many of the historic rooms were restored to their original appearance.
- In 1856, the old theater of the palace, built in the 18th century, was destroyed by a fire in the wing of the Belle Cheminée.
- Between 1854 and 1857 the architect Hector Lefuel built a new theater in the style of Louis XVI.
- The Empress Eugénie built a museum on the ground floor of the Gros Pavillon, containing gifts from the King of Siam in 1861, and works of art taken during the pillage of the Summer Palace in Beijing. It also featured paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists.
- In 1870, during the Franco-German War, the Empire fell, and the Château was closed.

### Present Days

- During World War II, Germans occupied it in 1940 and 1941.
- Following the war, part of the Chateau became a headquarters of the Allied Forces Central Europe until 1966.
- Between 1964 and 1968, the general restoration of the Chateau took place.
- In 1981, it was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- In 2006, the Ministry of Culture purchased the royal stables and began their restoration.
- In 2015, the Chinese Museum of the Chateau was robbed.

### Reference

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