

## Why You Must Visit Mont Saint-Michel

You read about my recent visit to Paris and Normandy, each with their own unique experiences. Our next stop on this amazing tour of several French regions is Mont Saint-Michel, which is actually an island that is tucked into in a bay between Normandy and Brittany. The bay itself as well as Mont Saint-Michel have both been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and are amazingly well-preserved.

My first thought upon seeing the grandeur of the place: *"Wow, just wow.."*

That initial thought was quickly followed up with images of enchanted buildings that one might see in some Disney theme park, or within the scenes of some enchanting film in the realm of magic and fairytales. Disney does do a fair job creating mystical worlds within their films to be sure, but I imagine that Mont Saint-Michel is the very pinnacle of what Disney hopes to be.

It truly was magical!

To provide some context for you, let's review a bit of the background of this majestic site. The history of it dates back to about 900 A.D. The beauty and longevity of the structure are remarkable. There is an Abbey located on the top of the island in the very center, just like it was placed on its own grand throne to rule over the bay. The Abbey itself boasts three types of architecture, going back as far as the Romanesque style and launching forward into the classical Baroque period. While the Abbey is still magnificently present and preserved, its purpose has changed a bit; it is no longer a Benedictine Abbey as it used to be in eras past. Instead, it now hosts an order from Jerusalem. Either way, the place is a wondrous sight to behold!

### **Monday 11/12: A Glorious Welcome**

Upon our arrival here, my wife, Anne, and I walked around for just a bit and then went out to capture images of the sun setting. Wouldn't you know that we were greeted with a marvelous sunset to nearly rival the picturesque beauty of the island itself? What a way to be welcomed on our very first visit here!

### **Tuesday 11/13: Early Morning Excursion**

I know that perfection does not truly exist, but this day came extremely close to it. Anne decided to sleep in but I woke up early to take advantage of the early morning light splashing upon the Abbey as the sun began its ascent into the sky.

The morning was quite chilly, making for a brisk way to begin the day. I set off down the long bridge which was somewhere between one half mile to a full mile in length. After the bridge ended, I made a left turn and ventured out into the salt marsh. Interestingly enough the brochures tell you not to go here alone and that you should always have your cell phone at the ready in case of emergencies. It is important to follow directions, yes?

So, naturally, I went alone. (Call me a rebel if you must!)

I made it through just fine and, quite obviously, survived to tell the tale of my solo morning excursion. There was a moment though where I might have wished for a walking companion that those brochures so wisely suggested. I slipped in the mud and nearly fell flat on my butt! That was about the time that I realized it's very helpful if you walk on the small plants rather than next to them. It is also wise to learn from another's experiences or missteps when possible. So, here is a brief word to the wise: keep to the small plants in the salt marsh to get a good footing and (hopefully) prevent yourself from sinking (or falling!) into the mud. Or at the very least, bring someone else along who will be able to pull you up from the muck and not laugh at you too much.

Once I made it through the salt marsh I waited around for about a half an hour for the sun to make its glorious appearance. As I waited, I kept scanning the area to find the most interesting place that would allow me to do my best in capturing this breathtaking beauty of the area. I was so moved by the wonder all around me and I hope my photos do the place some justice.

For those interested in more of a behind-the-scenes detail in terms of camera and equipment used, I did bring a small tripod with me on the trip. Though for the most part I did not use that little tripod anywhere. Instead, I opted for high ISO settings when needed so I could have the shutter speed necessary to hold everything by hand.

### **Tuesday: 11/13: Post-Sunrise Ventures**

I returned to our room after my sunrise photo shoot so I could prepare for the rest of our day. We had a wonderful breakfast at the historic La Mère Poulard, a place where famous people the world over have been. Its history goes back to the late 1800s, so you can imagine the lengthy list of celebrities and royalty who must surely have dined here throughout these many years.

Our task for this particular Tuesday was to simply explore Mont Saint-Michel and allow ourselves the time to slowly savor the awe-inspiring details of the place. As fate would have it, we made it to the Abbey at the very top of the island at the very same time a guided tour was about to begin. What luck! The tour just happened to be in English so we decided to join. It was simply exquisite.

Once the tour came to an end, we then set off to do some more exploring on our own. This self-guided tour ended with a lunch time meal consisting of two simple yet delicious sandwiches. The addition of a bit of wine turned our simple little meal into a perfect picnic lunch. What could be more fitting for an afternoon in France than a lovely meal and a glass or two of good French wine?

### **Tuesday 11/13: One Last Photo Shoot**

I thought my photographing sessions were all wrapped up for the day when Anne convinced me to venture out just one more time. Again, I did my absolute best to capture this grand island, though it was from a different perspective this time. I am glad that she suggested we head out to shoot a few more photos since we ended up with some spectacular images from this new vantage point.

After capturing this fresh perspective, we happened upon a tourist town just across the bridge. All that touring apparently whetted our appetite and we decided to have a bite to eat late that afternoon. We enjoyed the little town so much that we stayed in the area until sunset was nearly upon us.

We decided to venture back toward the island once more so we headed off into the salt marsh, this time in the opposite direction of where I very nearly fell into the mud.

Fortunately, we crossed the marsh in time to capture the Abbey itself as well as its gloriously full reflection in the receding tide across the mud flats. What a sight! I can only hope to give you an idea of the majestic beauty we saw through the photos I was able to take.

At the end of our trip to Mont Saint-Michel, my SD cards were filling up quickly. I had three cards, each 64 GB each, and all were full. That left room for about 200 more images for my one remaining SD card—so I knew I would be shooting sparingly for the rest of our trip!

### **Wednesday 11/14: Departure for the Chateau Region**

Our short time here came to an end which meant we departed for the Chateau Region on Wednesday. Mont-Saint Michel is not something one can easily put into words. Even if I were to tell you to picture a castle from your favorite childhood movie, that would only give you a glimmer of the wonder that is Mont-Saint Michel. In order to grasp the full grandeur of the place, you simply need to make this a must-see item on your travel list!