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FREE GUIDE · PARIS

# Sainte-Chapelle

Saint Louis's Gothic jewel box — the 6 keys to the Sainte-Chapelle and its 15 windows of fire, explained one by one

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## Your visit at a glance

**T**ucked into a courtyard of the Palais de Justice, in the heart of the Île de la Cité, the Sainte-Chapelle can't be seen from outside: that's exactly why its interior takes your breath away. Saint Louis raised it in barely seven years —a record for its time— and consecrated it in 1248 to house the Crown of Thorns; the result is the summit of Rayonnant Gothic. Here the walls all but disappear and everything is colour: 1,113 biblical scenes spread across fifteen windows fifteen metres high. This guide brings together the chapel's six essential keys —from the gloom of the lower chapel to the explosion of the upper one—, explained one by one, with half-hour, one-hour and hour-and-a-half routes (adding in the Conciergerie) so you can choose according to the time you have. It's the most luminous visit in Paris, and one of the shortest.

### At a glance

#### PRICE

≈ €16 EU · €22 others

#### HOURS

9am-7pm (5pm in winter)

#### HIGHLIGHTS HERE

The 6 key stops

#### FREE ENTRY

under 18 · EU 18-25

#### TIME

45 min - 1 h

#### METRO

Cité (L4)



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*With this free guide you already do a great visit: the essentials, with a route. If you want to make the most of it, at the end I'll show you the complete version.*

## Before you go in: book your skip-the-line ticket

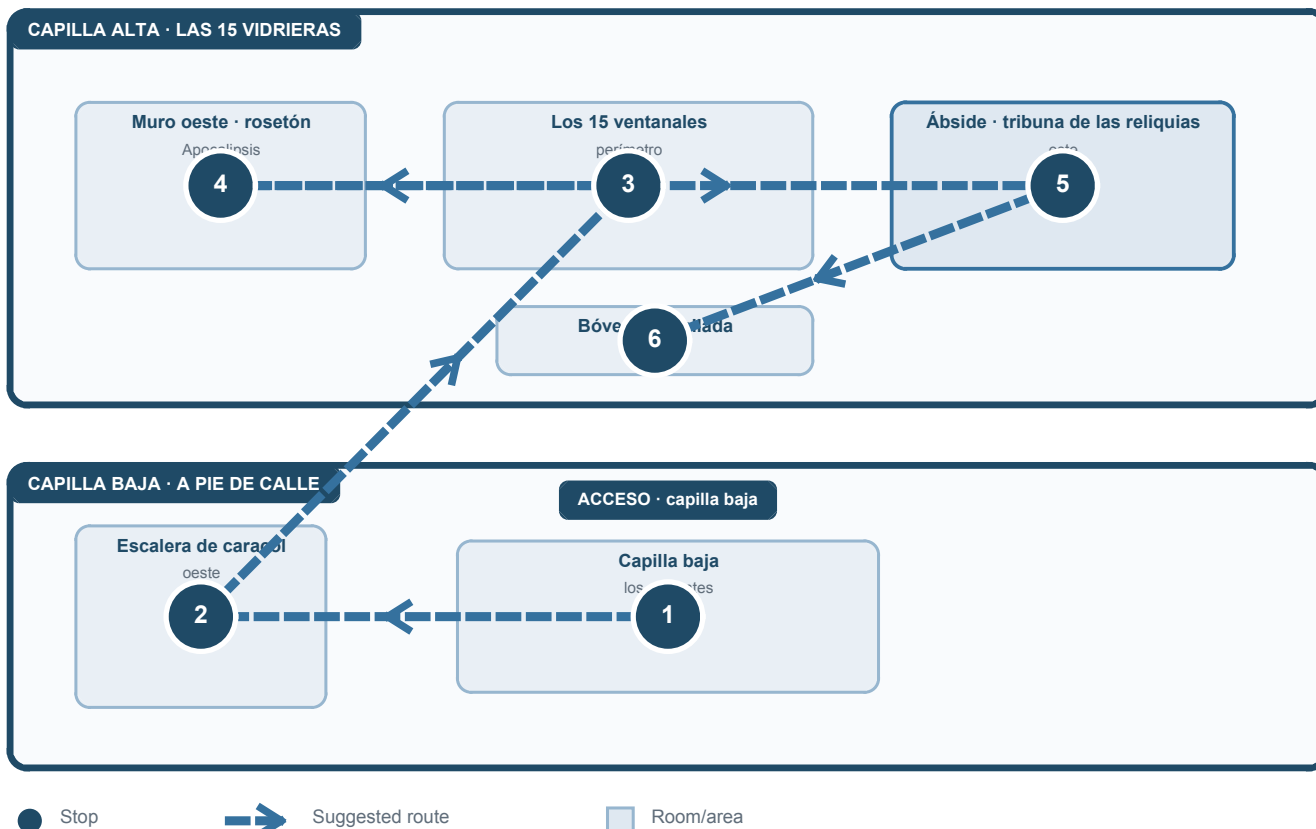
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## The map and the route

The route is simple and vertical. You come in through the lower chapel, dim and low-ceilinged, built for the palace staff and dedicated to the Virgin. From there a spiral staircase takes you up to the upper chapel, the one reserved for the king, and this is where the miracle happens: a forest of stained glass that wraps around you 360 degrees. Walk along the windows following the biblical story, turn around towards the Apocalypse rose window above the door, step up to the tribune where the relics were kept and finish by gazing at the star-studded vault. All in a single space, with no walls in between. Follow the numbers on the stops: they run in the most comfortable order, from the bottom up.

SAINTE-CHAPELLE · SECCIÓN DE LAS DOS CAPILLAS (ESQUEMA, NO A ESCALA)



Se entra por la capilla baja y se sube por una escalera de caracol (al oeste) a la capilla alta, forrada de vidrieras. El ábside con las reliquias queda al este (derecha); el rosetón, al oeste (izquierda).

**Visiting order: LOWER CHAPEL: 1 The lower chapel — UP THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE: 2 The climb — UPPER CHAPEL: 3 The 15 windows › 4 The Apocalypse rose window (turn around) › 5 The relic tribune (at the far end) › 6 The starry vault and the wall-less structure**

Schematic layout by area; the number shows the visiting order. Not to scale: follow the museum's own floor plans and signs on the day.

## THE STOPS, ONE BY ONE

3

## The 15 stained-glass windows

Surrounding you completely in the upper chapel · 18

Fifteen windows fifteen metres tall surround the upper chapel and make up the largest surviving 13th-century set, with two thirds of the glass original. They tell the whole Bible, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, in more than a thousand scenes. They read from the bottom up, panel by panel.



*The forest of stained glass in the upper chapel, more than a thousand biblical scenes at fifteen metres high.*

Photo: Gerda Arendt · CC0 · Wikimedia Commons



### DO THIS

Pick a single window and follow its story from the bottom up instead of trying to take them all in.

### » IN THE PREMIUM GUIDE

One of the fifteen windows sets the Bible aside to tell an event from the 13th century itself, with kings and processions among its panels. In the full guide we tell you where it is and read it scene by scene.

## THE STOPS, ONE BY ONE

4

## The Apocalypse rose window

West wall, above the entrance, behind you as you come up · 6

The west rose window is Flamboyant, added in the 15th century, with flame-like shapes busier than the rest. It depicts the Apocalypse in nearly ninety panels, with Christ in majesty. Facing west, it lights up especially at dusk.



*Panel from the Apocalypse rose window: the souls of the martyrs receive white robes (detail, c. 1485).*

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### THE DETAIL

The flame-like shapes of the stone tracery, different from the more sober Gothic of the other windows.

### » IN THE PREMIUM GUIDE

This rose window holds an 'anachronism' that almost no one notices at a glance, and even the hidden signature of a king. In the full guide we tell you how to spot it for yourself.

## THE STOPS, ONE BY ONE

5

## The relic tribune

Apse, at the far end of the upper chapel · 6

The apse tribune housed the Grande Châsse, the reliquary with the Crown of Thorns that Saint Louis bought in Constantinople. The whole chapel was conceived as a case for those relics. The original reliquary was lost in the Revolution and the present one is a reconstruction.



*The apse tribune, where Saint Louis kept the Crown of Thorns under a baldachin.*

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### WHERE TO LOOK

How all the architecture and light of the chapel converge towards this raised tribune.

### » IN THE PREMIUM GUIDE

In the full guide: how a king of France ended up buying the Crown of Thorns from a bankrupt emperor of Constantinople, and what became of the relic after the Revolution.



## THE STOPS, ONE BY ONE

6

## The starry vault and the wall-less structure

Looking at the ceiling, in the centre of the upper chapel · 5

The vault is blue with golden stars, like a night sky. The chapel is the purest example of Rayonnant Gothic: it has almost no wall, only glass held up by very slender supports, external buttresses and ties. The result is a space that seems to float in light.



*The starry vault crowns a structure that replaced walls with glass:  
Rayonnant Gothic in its purest state.*

Photo: InSapphoWeTrust from Los Angeles · CC BY-SA 2.0 · Wikimedia Commons



### LOOK AT IT LIKE THIS

How narrow the stone pillars are between window and window, almost impossible for what they hold up.

### » IN THE PREMIUM GUIDE

In the full guide: how a few almost invisible buttresses and iron ties make the wall disappear, and why the chapel has stood for almost eight centuries.

## Practical tips

### Best times

Go at midday and, if possible, on a sunny day: that's when the sun crosses the fifteen windows most strongly and the chapel fills with patches of colour. The west rose window, on the other hand, shines best at dusk. On cloudy days the effect loses quite a lot.

### Buy your ticket in advance

Book your ticket online and reserve a time slot: you'll enter through the fast-track access and the security check will go more smoothly. If you have time, get the combined ticket with the Conciergerie, which shares the same building and you can see on the same outing. Arrive a few minutes before your time, and watch out for the free Sundays in low season: there are quite a few more people.

### The security check

The chapel is inside the Palais de Justice, so there's an airport-style check at the entrance. Leave penknives, scissors or any sharp objects at the hotel and count on some queuing at that point, especially in mid-morning.

### With children

It works surprisingly well with little ones: suggest they look for specific scenes in the windows as if it were a game of 'find the dragon, the ship, the king'. It's a short visit, with hardly any text to read, and the visual impact hooks them. The spiral staircase is narrow, so mind the smallest children.

### Combine it

You're on the Île de la Cité: take the chance to see Notre-Dame, stroll the island and its Seine surroundings, and link up with the Conciergerie. In half a day you've covered the medieval heart of Paris with hardly any travelling.

### Accessibility and services

The lower chapel is at street level, but the upper chapel —the spectacular one— can only be reached by a narrow, steep spiral staircase, with no lift, so it isn't wheelchair accessible; the staff can advise you on the alternatives available. There's a shop at the exit and toilets on site; pick up the map of the windows as you go in so you don't get lost.

### Practical info

Address: 10 Boulevard du Palais, 75001 Paris, inside the grounds of the Palais de Justice. Guide price: around €16/adult for EU/EEA residents and €22 for everyone else; free for under-18s and for EU residents aged 18 to 25. Guide hours: open every day, roughly 9:00 to 19:00 in high season and until 17:00 in winter; check for closures. As it's inside the Palais de Justice, there's an airport-style security check at the entrance: avoid penknives, scissors and sharp objects, and allow for some queuing. Always check current prices and hours at [sainte-chapelle.fr](http://sainte-chapelle.fr).

**Official website:** [www.sainte-chapelle.fr](http://www.sainte-chapelle.fr)

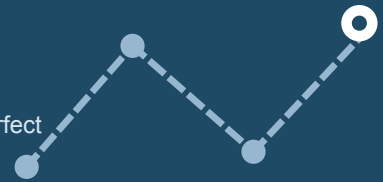


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## THE COMPLETE VERSION

## Take the complete visit

With this free guide you already cover the essentials. The PREMIUM is your complete visit to Sainte-Chapelle: every work with its story, a 3-step looking guide for every painting, the cheat-sheet for your phone and the tips to skip the queues. For less than the price of a coffee.

**In the free guide you miss out on:**

- 1 The lower chapel**  
Street level, right as you enter · 8
- 2 The climb to the upper chapel**  
Spiral staircase at the far end of the lower chapel · 3

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» **Check availability and prices**

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