
SACRED DESTINATIONS: On The Road With Brad Olsen

The Many Aspects of Mont Saint Michel

Easily the most famous sacred site on the Normandy coast, just where it joins the peninsula of Brittany, is the island monastery of Mont Saint Michel, an extraordinary Gothic abbey complex that crowns the pinnacle of a steep rock outcropping. According to Celtic mythology the sea-surrounded mount was one of the ocean tombs where recently deceased souls were conveyed to the afterlife. After paganism was nearly eradicated, the first chapel on the mass of granite was built in 709 CE for Saint Michel and quickly became the goal for Christian pilgrims, as it remains today. The Gothic abbey was begun in 1020. The cathedral was established enough to host Harold the Saxon and William the Conqueror in 1058, yet it took until 1230 CE to complete the entire complex. Mont Saint Michel soon acquired the name *La Merveille*, meaning the "The Marvel," because of its awe-inspiring qualities and geographical positioning. The unusual tide surrounding the island withdraws as far as 10 miles (16 km), leaving Mont Saint Michel rising majestically on a smooth and sandy plain. At any given time the fog comes back to fill the bay and the sea eventually returns, racing toward the shore at an astonishing speed of 210 feet (63 m) per minute! With that in mind, I surmised it would be wise to know the direction of the tide before embarking on a walk across the vast mud flats to the island. I heard that some people unaware of the high tide fluctuations have drowned near Mont Saint Michel.

Anyone who sees "The Marvel" knows Mont Saint Michel is an extraordinary work of human ingenuity. The abbey's granite was sculpted to match the exact contours of the



MONT SAINT MICHEL

rocky pinnacle, and even though space has always been a factor, the complex has grown in an inventive geometric fashion. Benedictine monks prayed, studied, and worked on the monastery for many centuries. Guy de Maupassant called it "the most wonderful Gothic dwelling ever made for God on this earth." Mont Saint Michel has been described as a compact Gothic version of Heaven where the land meets the sea. Indeed, Mont Saint Michel resembles a castle out of a fairy-tale book and competes as one of Christendom's premier pilgrimages.

Ley of the land

If the history and stunning views of Mont Saint Michel weren't enough, there was one more aspect of this amazing place I needed to ponder. The site, I was told, holds a precise energy positioning along the European Saint Michael's Line. Modern dowsers describe ley lines as specific paths of potent Earth Energy, analogous to veins on any living entity, including those within Gaia the living planet. The scientific Gaia hypothesis proposes that the whole earth behaves like one self-regulating organism wherein all of the geologic, hydrologic and biologic cycles

of the planet mutually self-regulate the conditions on the surface of the planet so as to perpetuate life. Along the ley paths, especially at intersection points, early humans detected the energy and erected primitive shrines that later became great cathedrals. Great Britain has two central ley lines named after Saint Michael and Saint Mary, which dissect the country and connect major sacred sites. Another noted ley line in Europe is also named after the archangel Saint Michael, the heavenly defender and guardian against Satan. Arching across Europe is the Saint Michael's Line starting at Skellig Michael in Ireland, crossing Michael's Mont in Cornwall to Mont Saint Michel in France, then across the European mainland to the Monte Sant'Angelo grotto in Italy, through the ancient Greek sanctuaries of Delphi and Delos until it reaches the Holy Land. All along the route are shrines and statues dedicated to the highly venerated Archangel Michael.

Getting to Mont Saint Michel

The nearest train station to Mont Saint Michel is 4 miles (6 km) south at Pontorson. From there, take the bus to the Mont or rent a bicycle for an interesting ride to the sea. An alternative train stop is Avranches, where hotel prices are more reasonable. Paris is about 180 miles (290 km) to the west. Travel time is halved on a new high-speed train from Paris to Rennes, where a one-day sightseeing tour of Mont Saint Michel – including a stop in Saint Malo and Dinard – can be arranged. Check Rail Europe's website for train travel information (www.raileurope.com). Travelers can get fares and schedules as well as a wide selection of rail passes and tickets, but you must purchase before leaving the U.S. Call toll-free 1-888-382-7245 for schedules, maps and passes. 📄

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