

Château de Fontainebleau: The House of the Centuries



Step through the gates of the Château de Fontainebleau and you enter eight centuries of French history under one roof—an exceptional continuity from the Middle Ages to the Second Empire. Recognized by UNESCO in 1981, the Palace and Park of Fontainebleau fuse medieval origins, Renaissance invention, classical grandeur and imperial memory. It is here that François I cultivated a new artistic language with Italian masters Rosso Fiorentino and Primaticcio, giving rise to the School of Fontainebleau; and here, on April 20, 1814, Napoleon I took leave of the Imperial Guard in the main court. Few places in France bring so many defining chapters this close together. No wonder Napoleon later called it “the true home of kings, the house of the centuries.”

At a glance

- Location: Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau, Île-de-France, France
- UNESCO: Inscribed in 1981 as the Palace and Park of Fontainebleau
- Timeline: From a medieval royal residence under Louis VII to the Second Empire and beyond
- Renaissance impact: François I invited Italian artists Rosso Fiorentino and Primaticcio, catalyzing the School of Fontainebleau
- Iconic feature: Horseshoe staircase in the Cour du Cheval Blanc, designed by Jean Androuet du Cerceau for Louis XIII
- Landscape highlights: Grand Parterre by André Le Nôtre (considered the largest formal parterre in Europe); English Garden reshaped by Maximilien-Joseph Hurtault with a winding artificial river
- Not-to-miss interiors: Royal and imperial apartments, reception salons, and historic galleries including the François I Gallery (access may vary with conservation)

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