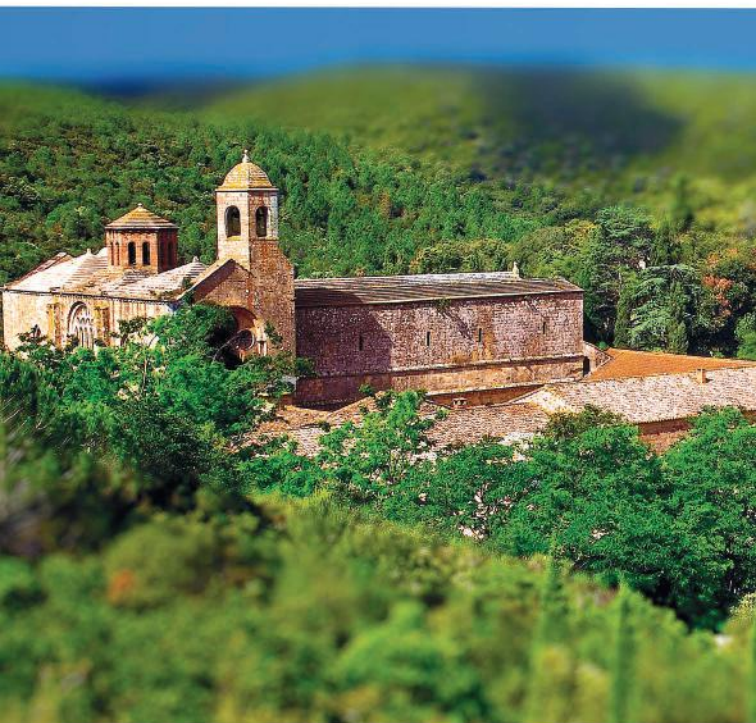




Abbaye de FONTFROIDE

Visitor's guide



Abbaye
de FONTFROIDE

Plan of the abbey

Access to the paths

Access to the abbey

Shop

Wine-tasting cellar

Restaurant

Toilets

1

2

3

4

5

6

6a

7

8

9

10

11

12

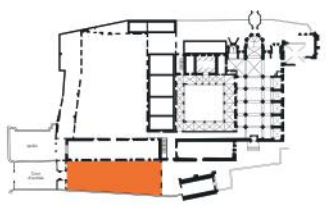
Ticket Inspection
Start of the tour

Exit
Revolving gate

Foundation of Fontfroide

Affiliation to the Cistercian order after Saint Bernard of Clairvaux comes to the Languedoc

The assassination of Pierre de Castelnau, a monk from Fontfroide and Apostolic legate, sets in motion the crusade against the Cathars.



1 Main courtyard

In a period of upheaval for Christian monasticism, a number of monastic orders were founded in the 11th and 12th centuries seeking to restore spiritual life according to the Rule of Saint Benedict (6th century). The Cistercian order thrived towards this objective during the 12th century from Cîteaux Abbey (Burgundy 1098), mainly thanks to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153). Fontfroide was founded in 1093 and joined the order in 1145.

The community of Fontfroide grew quickly. Thanks to a number of seignorial donations and despite a slowdown at the start of the 13th century, land ownership increased to some 30,000 ha between Beziers and Spain. This auspicious period lasted until the middle of the 14th century. The Black Death reached Narbonne in February 1438, and only a small part of the community survived.

From 1476 to the French Revolution of 1789, Fontfroide was "in commendam". Under this complex system, the management of the affairs of the Abbey was entrusted to "commended" abbots who did not have a liturgical role. They were appointed by the Pope and, after the Concordat of Bologna (1616), by the King of France. The commendatory abbots would take the entire income of the Abbey but frequently gave only the bare minimum to the community. As a result, the community of Fontfroide became poorer and smaller in number. In 1594, there were only seven monks left; they received less than half of the income from the Abbey (known as the "conventual mense") while the larger share (the "abbatical mense") went to the commendatory abbots.

During the "in commendam" period, three families took possession of some of the buildings and refurbished them: from 1476 to 1531 the Narbonne-Lara family, between 1548 and 1646 the Italian Frégose family, and between 1667 and 1717 the La Rouchefoucauld family.

The main courtyard (cour d'honneur) was built between the 16th and 17th centuries. In the building on the left, the abbot's quarters with Renaissance-style mullion windows replaced two-thirds of a former dormitory for lay brothers.

The porch and the classic frieze of blind arcades were added in the 18th century. The Italian gardens behind the west wall were probably designed by the Frégose family in the 16th and 17th centuries.

1348

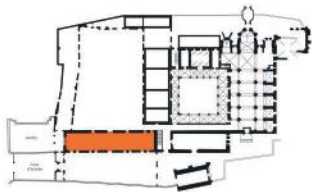
The Black Death reduces the community to around 20 monks only

1476

Fontfroide is placed "in commendam" and the community is managed by commendatory abbots appointed by the Pope and later by the King

1791

The Abbey is abandoned during the French Revolution

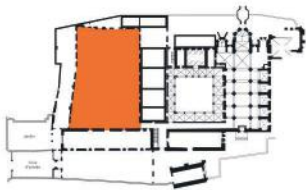


2 Lay brothers' refectory

In Cistercian abbeys, monks and lay brothers lived in separate quarters. Under the Rule of Saint Benedict, monks were not allowed to leave the grounds of the monastery. The work on the farms which belonged to the monastery and produced everything for the self-sufficient existence of the monastery (livestock, agriculture, wine production) was therefore effected by "lay brothers" (or "conversi"). Usually, they were illiterate peasants who had to perform only limited religious duties: Lay brothers attended church only once on Sundays and on religious feast days while the monks spent seven or eight hours with prayers and oration every day.

The refectory was built at the end of the 12th century and accommodated 200 – 250 persons. In the Middle Ages, the refectory was much darker and could be accessed only through the small doorway near the fireplace. The three large openings were fitted after the 15th century.

The Renaissance-style fireplace originated from the castle of the Dukes of Montmorency in Pézenas which was destroyed in the 17th century. It was installed in the refectory for purely decorative purposes at the start of the 20th century by Gustave Fayet who later also added wrought iron railings with vine leave motifs. In the Middle Ages, only the forge, the kitchens, the bakery, the scriptorium and the infirmary were heated, but not the refectories or the dormitories.



3 Central courtyard (or Louis XIV courtyard)

For founding a new monastery in a remote location, wood, stone, and above all, water, had to be available nearby. Fontfroide is exemplary of an abbey built in a valley in which these three essential elements could be found from the outset.

In the Middle Ages, the central courtyard housed many workshops: The forge, the joinery and the bakery were all built around a well which was fed by an under ground cistern providing very cold water from which the Abbey derived its name "Fontfroide" (fons frigidus or cold spring).

The abbey is built mostly from sandstone which is very resistant but sensitive to changes in temperature and climate. The colour varieties are due to exposure to the sun over a long period.

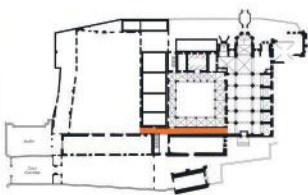
The courtyard obtained its current "classical" rectangular shape at the end of the 18th century when only a few monks and no lay brothers were left.

1843

First restauration work is carried out under the direction of Viollet de Duc. The buildings receive the first classification as a historical monument from Prosper Mérimée

1858

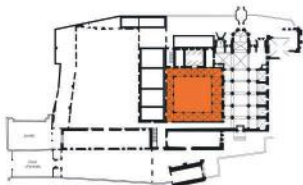
The Cistercians of the Immaculate Conception form a new community at Fontfroide, living in the most frugal conditions



4 Lay brothers' passageway

The entrance to the lay brothers' refectory is located on the right of the courtyard. The door opposite leads to the kitchen which was converted into a sitting room in the 18th century. Behind this the monks' refectory was situated. The kitchen was located between the two refectories.

The corridor running along the pantry is called the "lay brothers' passageway"; it marks the boundary between the buildings for the monks and those for the lay brothers. Through the passageway, the lay brothers could reach the storerooms in the cellar and also the rear part of the church without disturbing the recital of the psalms by the monks during the Liturgy of Hours. Such a passageway today exists in very few Cistercian abbeys only, and the one in Fontfroide is unique with its half-barrel vault.



5 Cloister

The cloister is central to spiritual life (church to the south) and material life (kitchen, monks' refectory, scriptorium to the north). It is not only a useful passageway but also a place to walk, to meditate and to read.

In the southern gallery, two stone basins were used for the "mandatum" ceremony, the ritual washing of the feet carried out by Cistercians every Saturday.

The initial Romanesque cloister covered with a wooden roof was reconstructed and raised using Gothic techniques (rib vault) in the 13th century. Large "oculi" (Latin for "eyes") at the centre of the tympani allow the light to flood the floor. Small marble columns replaced the original sandstone pillars. The perfectly preserved decoration of the capitals shows high-quality plant motifs from the region, reflecting the Cistercian rule under which there are to be no depictions of animals or human beings.

The original austerity of the Abbey was lost as a result of the extraordinary expansion of Fontfroide which continued until the middle of the 14th century. The Abbey even appointed a Pope with Jacques Fournier, Abbot of Fontfroide from 1311 to 1317. He became the third pope in Avignon reigning from 1334 to 1342 under the name of Benedict XII and initiated the construction of the famous Palais des Papes (Papal Palace). This is commemorated by the tiara in the western gallery of the cloister.

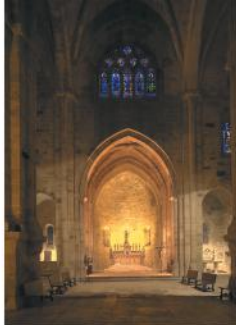
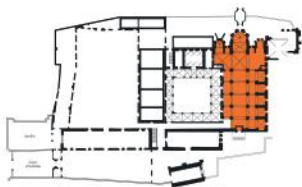
1901

The community of Fontfroide flees into exile in Spain. Fontfroide is abandoned

1908

Gustave and Madeleine Fayet purchase Fontfroide Abbey. Their descendants continue to maintain the site and to preserve its history

6 Abbey church



Prayers, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, took the monks to the church every day in a canonical division: vigils (between 2 and 3 am), lauds (at dawn), prime, terce, sext, none (first, third, sixth and ninth hour of the day), vesper (at dusk) and compline (before bed). On Sundays and feast days, a mass for the convent was held between terce and sext.

Fontfroide Abbey is one of the highest Cistercian churches built during the second half of the 12th century with a height of 20 m and a length of 60 m.

With its pointed barrel vault, it forms a remarkable example of the sober and uncluttered style of Cistercian architecture in the transition from the Romanesque to Gothic.

Five chapels and a rostrum for elderly or sick monks were added in the 14th century. The staircase which dates from the first building period allowed monks to access the church directly from their dormitory for nocturnal prayers.



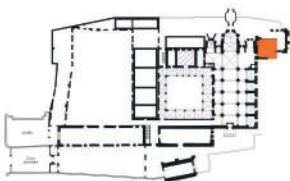
The stained glass windows in the church

Cistercian architecture is typified by its austerity and simplicity; only grisaille windows are used. By stark contrast, the current stained glass windows provide an idea of what artistic life in Fontfroide must have been like at the beginning of the 20th century.

When Gustave Fayet bought the abbey, he decided to have the bare windows glazed with rightly coloured stained glass. He commissioned them from Richard Burgsthal, one of his many artist friends who had been a painter and musician at Fontfroide since 1908. Burgsthal created "verrierie des sablons", and all the windows for the church were produced at Bièvres glassworks from 1913 onwards. They were completed in 1925, when Gustave Fayet had already died.

The style of the stained glass windows and their dazzling colours evoke the Russian ballets that were highly popular in Paris at the turn of the century. The large rose window on the western façade symbolises the creation of the world, with a majestically seated God Father who is surrounded by the signs of the zodiac and angels.

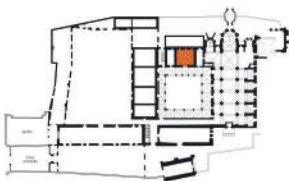
The five windows in the northern aisle unusually do not show scenes from the life of Saint Bernard, patron saint of the Cistercians, but scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Friars Minor order, in a subtle gradation of shades of green.



6a Chapel of the Dead or Chapel of Saint Bernard

This chapel was built in the 13th century at the order of Olivier de Termes, one of the Abbey's most loyal benefactors who left most of his assets to the Abbey in his will.

In addition to the contemporary stained glass windows by Kim En Joong (2009), the Chapel of Saint Bernard is the showcase for a number of high-quality works of art which were put on display after their acquisition by the Fayet family (Calvary, recumbent statues, sculptures ...). The centre of the chapel features a stone cross (or Calvary) decorated with Christ on one side and the Virgin with a halo on the other.



7 Chapter House

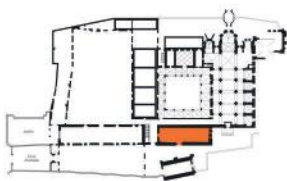
The monastic community would meet in the Chapter House each morning to sing "Prime" (the first prayer of the day). Seated around the Abbot, the monks would then listen to the reading of the martyrology naming the saints to be commemorated over the coming days, before hearing a chapter ("capitula") from the Rule of Saint Benedict. The "capitula" ("chapter") gave its name to both the assembly and to the place where it was held.

The assembly was also the moment when the daily work and the distribution of tasks were decided upon, and where generally anything concerning the life of the Abbey was discussed.

The chapter meetings ended with the public confession of failings to respect the rule, the "mea culpa".

The Chapter House features the same architectural crossing as the transept and the choir of the church.

The nine Romanesque arches and the centre vault are supported by four marble columns. The capitals are decorated with two layers of flat leaves representing the "cistels", the reeds growing by the ponds in Burgundy that gave Cîteaux its name.



8 Lay brothers' dormitory, Great Staircase

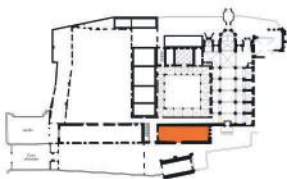
The dormitory was originally three times the current size. The lay brothers slept fully dressed in small wooded beds on straw mattresses, covered with two blankets. The beds were separated from each other by little wooden partitions.

The southern half of the vast hall with its pointed barrel vaults which was constructed of pink sandstone without a single transverse arch was later used as a grain store. After the alterations of the 18th century, lay brothers would bring the sacks of grain which were too delicate for storage in the damp cellar into what remained of the lay brothers' dormitory.

The majestic Great Staircase dates from the 18th century.

The stained glasses in the Lay Brothers' Dormitory

The four rectangular openings glazed with unusual stained glass, The four rectangular glazed openings which bring in a little light were commissioned by Gustave Fayet and designed by Richard Burgsthal. The stained glass formations are compositions assembled like a jigsaw from fragments of ancient stained glass windows; they mostly come from churches in north-eastern France which were bombed during the First World War, in particular the Abbey of Saint-Remi in Reims.



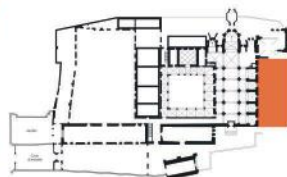
9 Cellar storeroom and Romanesque Doorway

In the Middle Ages, the Romanesque Doorway presented the only entrance to the Abbey. Despite its modest appearance, it is in fact a particularly fine example of Romanesque architecture in its raw and pure simplicity. The doorway leads directly into the cellar storeroom, a low, vaulted room of vast proportions with very thick walls keeping food cool and fresh.



10 Chapel for visitors to the Abbey

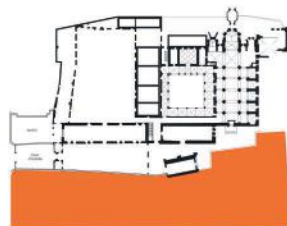
The chapel which is separate from the other buildings is the only remaining structure dating from the pre-Cistercian origins of Fontfroide. It probably was the first church of the Abbey before it was used as the chapel for visitors and pilgrims who were not allowed access to the Abbey church from the 12th century onwards. Today the first floor of the chapel houses the Gustave Fayet room exhibiting works by the former owner of Fontfroide. The museum can be visited separately. *Planta baja privada.*



11 Rose garden

Within the confines of the monastery, richly perfumed terraced gardens were planted with roses, bushes, shrubs and wild flowers from the surrounding scrubland ("garrigue"). At the foot of the Abbey, a new rose garden was laid out in 1990 after a very serious fire; it includes more than 2,500 roses of 14 different varieties including the Cistercian Rose and, since, 2013, a new variety specially grown for the Abbey: la Rose de Fontfroide (The Fontfroide Rose).

A little further on, the Saint Fiacre enclosure is a fragrance garden planted with ancient varieties of English roses and aromatic plants from the garrigue: honeysuckle, thyme, lavender, rosemary, broom, citronella.



12 The terraced gardens

Located on a hillside opposite the Abbey buildings, the terraced gardens were created at the end of the 16th century by Constance de Frégose, mother of a commendatory abbot of Fontfroide. The gardens were arranged as a series of walled gardens and terraces following a layout that had been designed by the monks over the centuries.

In the 20th century, the gardens were remodelled by the Fayet family who continued to develop them by setting new plants, adding a network of ponds and fountains (including the impressive Neptune pond) as well as marble statues and vases. The gardens have been awarded the Jardins Remarquables (remarkable gardens) and the Refuge LPO (protected birds) labels.



Practical information:

Duration of visit: approx. 1 – 1.30 hours

- No dogs (kennels available)
- Please wear suitable dress
- Please show discretion and respect
- No smoking, no picnics
- Please do not touch any artefacts
- Parents take responsibility for their under-age children

Dear visitors,
thank you for your interest in Fontfroide Abbey.
This unique cultural monument is entirely privately-owned.
Your visit contributes to the conserving and promoting
of one of region's most emblematic sites.
Fontfroide staff will be happy to answer any questions
or provide any assistance you may require.

Other attractions

Fontfroide wine cellar:

Sample and purchase the wines of Fontfroide

Our restaurant "La Table de Fontfroide" and the café:

Open for lunch everyday from February to December,
and from 1st July to 31st August Tuesday to Saturday
also open in the evening

Join Amis de Fontfroide as a member

The friends of Fontfroide contribute to organising concerts
and helping the monument

Contact: amis@fontfroide.com



Charte Européenne
des Abbayes et des
Sites Cisterciens



Abbaye de Fontfroide
RD 613 - 11100 Narbonne
Tel. 04 68 45 11 08 - Fax 04 68 45 18 31
info@fontfroide.com
www.fontfroide.com

