



VISIT DOCUMENT

**CHÂTEAU-ABBAYE
de**

CASSAN

FORMER ROYAL PRIORY



«LE SECRET DE MARTHE» of Thao Tenet *

* *book only available in French*

If the priory church of Notre-Dame de Cassan is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the history of Cassan is closely tied to that of Saint Martha.



Martha welcomed Jesus into her home in Bethany when he wished to rest; it was in Bethany where he met Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, the brother and sister of Martha. After the crucifixion, the Holy Family and Jesus' close followers had to flee Palestine to escape the reprisals of the Romans. They arrived on the shores of the village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Provence by boat. Martha settled in Tarascon, where she tamed the amphibious monster «the Tarasque». Later, she came to Cassan and achieved the same feat.

The southern hill to which Cassan is attached became known as Saint Martha's Hill. Martha's body rests in Tarascon in the collegiate church built for her; her arm and left hand were offered as a relic to Cassan. Today, these relics can be seen piously preserved in the church of Saint Laurent de Roujan, in the openwork tabernacle surmounted by a white marble statue of Saint Martha, with the Tarasque, sculpted in black marble, at her feet.

In his novel «Le Secret de Marthe,» Thao Tenet starts with the suspicious death of Pope John Paul I, who reigned for only 33 days. This mystery leads to the discovery of the Gospel of Martha at Cassan, which tells a story of Jesus not quite the same as the one reported in the canonical gospels.



Statue of Saint Martha and its tabernacle in the apse of the church of Saint Laurent de Roujan.

The Cassan estate wished to mark the exact location where the Gospel was found with a commemorative stone; this humble stone features the enigmatic drawing that led to the discovery of the gospel.

La pierre commémorative est visible sous le platane nord ouest de la cour d'honneur.

This wonderful novel is available for sale in the shop as well as in bookstores. Do not hesitate to ask for it; it will make you relive the beautiful moments of your visit to the Cassan site.

The commemorative stone is visible under the northwest plane tree in the courtyard.



Shrine reliquary of Sainte-Marthe, in the church of Saint Laurent de Roujan.

Welcome in the Château-Abbaye of Cassan



Today, rediscovered, Cassan is a major site in the Languedoc-Roussillon region. Primarily, Cassan belongs to the region and to the people of Languedoc as a Historic Heritage site classified since 1953.

All those who lived in this place were touched by the grace of the site. The religious fervor was continuous. Power, glory, and fortune alternated with decline, the catastrophes of epidemics, and the dramas of wars. The care provided to the sick in hospices, the soothing of those who came to Cassan to die or to choose it as their burial place, and the comfort of those who found lodging and a warm meal on the way to Santiago de Compostela built the monastery's renown; in contrast, numerous romantic affairs unfolded here, viticultural businesses flourished, a school, integration centers, and even the circus found a home!

Cassan traversed the centuries, being built, razed, burned, and rebuilt again. Among its long chain of «promoters,» the case was fortunate with Saint-Guiraud, who built a Romanesque church at the beginning of the second millennium, just as the case with Commendatory Prior François Pas de Beaulieu, who constructed the conventual

palace 600 years later. The new owners, in their modest way but with the support of all those who love Cassan, have the ambition, on the threshold of the third millennium, to restore a radiant place to this significant site.

Architects, decorators, historians, and scenographers, in consultation with the Regional Conservatory of Historical Monuments, elected officials, administrations, and the local economic community, have the mission to prepare a restructuring project for the coming years.

Nearly 500 tons of rubble were removed from the 2000 m² interiors of the first and second floors, thus erasing the scars and horizontal and vertical mutilations inherited from the rooms created during the occupancy by the integration center for workers from overseas territories.

In 2017, the roof of the main body was renovated, thereby protecting the 18th-century palace from water damage.





Practical Information

In 2003, we renovated the reception hall through which you entered to make it more welcoming.

- The plan of your visit circuit is on the back of this brochure.
- Some areas may be under construction or occupied by activities. They cannot be visited in such cases, and we thank you for your understanding.
- We thank you for respecting health and social distancing measures, safety instructions, and for supervising the children accompanying you. Adapting your behavior to this historical site, not running, enhances the safety of the visit.
- We thank you for taking care not to damage anything and to inform us in case of any accidents, whatever they may be.
- For parents with very young children, we have provided a changing table and a bottle warmer in the women's restroom; the restrooms are located at the exit of the enfilade salons, in the castle part (see plan).
- The reception staff is at your disposal to help you, give you advice, or take note of your remarks.
- A guest book is freely available for you to share your observations.
- A detail scavenger hunt activity is planned for children: please speak to the reception staff, who will give it to you.

This is just the beginning

As of now, to make your visit to the ground floor more pleasant and because we intend to host visitors, we have lightly furnished the salons. The paintings have been refreshed. The gardens have not yet been restructured. Those who might expect to find an "amusement park" experience at Cassan will be disappointed, and we apologize to them.

However, if you come to Cassan to meet history, both of the Humble and the Mighty; if you come to seek and discover the traces of the builders of Romanesque churches; if you want to read in the stone the religious fervor and symbolism, omnipresent; if you want to savor this place of peace; if you dream of the splendor of the 18th century in what was a small Languedocian Versailles, after having been the Saint Denis of the all-powerful princely house of the Trencavel, counts of Carcassonne, viscounts of Agde, Béziers, Albi, and Razès; if you want to shudder at the affairs of the revolution, or if, like the *Little Prince* by Saint-Exupéry, you want to watch the sunset on the grand western façade more than 70 meters long where the golden stone sings in hues of pink and pastel... then you will return to Cassan.





Engraving by Lucien Gauthier, Cassan, 1894, Médiathèque Emile Zola, Montpellier

A bit of History

Most likely, Cassan was initially a Celtic site. The Gallo-Romans, naturally and generally continuing the sacred occupation of Celtic sites to venerate their own gods, settled there.

After the fall of Rome in 410, the period of Visigothic occupation began. This period was rich and constructive. It left numerous traces and legends in the region, including in Roujan, within the very commune of Cassan.

After the defeat of the Goths by Clovis in 507 (Battle of Vouillé), the retreat of the Visigothic kingdom began, extending beyond the Pyrenees; from then on, and logically, the occupation of the Cassan site continued under the Merovingian and then the Carolingian Frankish kingdom. It is known for certain that there was already a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Cassan in 1066, belonging to

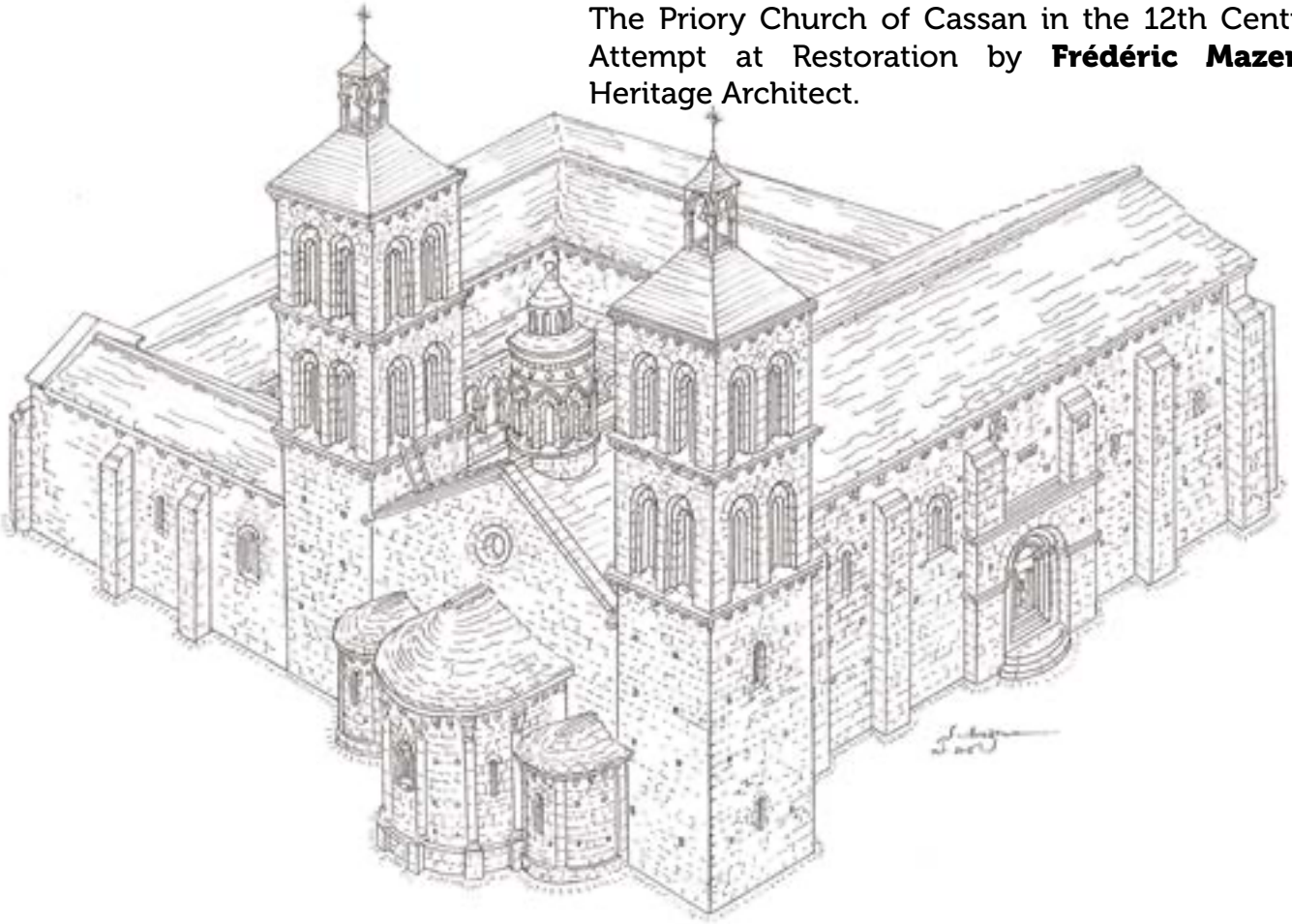
the family of Guilhem Alquier, of Carolingian comital descent.

Was this church founded by Charlemagne upon his return from the campaign in Spain, as was the case with Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert? Was it founded even earlier, at the time of Clovis's conversion, or under the influence of Saint Aphrodisius? Or was it established even before that, to honor Saint Martha in the early days of Christianity?

This is a question that fascinates us, and we would like to lift the veil to know the era of the Christian cult's establishment at Cassan. Historians are working on the subject, including Christian d'Andlau Hombourg, who focuses his research on «Parzival» by Wolfram Von Eschenbach, whose path, the route of the Grail, passes through Cassan. One of the links is the relic of the skull of Saint Lazarus the Resurrected, kept in the crypt of the church of Andlau in Alsace, and the relics of his sister, Saint Martha (the arm, forearm, and hand), preserved at Cassan.



The Priory Church of Cassan in the 12th Century, Attempt at Restoration by **Frédéric Mazeran**, Heritage Architect.



The names of sites are not chosen at random, and the Priory of Cassan is nestled at the foot of Saint Martha's Hill... While we wait for an answer, the documented Christian history begins in 1066, as Serge Sotos, historian of Cassan, reminds us.

In 1066, five canons from the cathedral chapter of Béziers, living under the rule of Saint Augustine, joined the church of Cassan, which was later donated to them by the Alquier family in 1080. They established an independent Priory there. Although more powerful than many abbeys, Cassan was never an abbey. After the Revolution, Cassan took the secular name of «château.»

Guiraud, mentioned for the first time in Cassan in 1085, was ordained a priest in 1101 and then elected Prior upon the death of the founding prior on February 9, 1106. Under his direction, the Priory gained unparalleled renown in the region and considerable wealth

from donations, lands, and churches spread over 80 communes. Thanks to this wealth, Guiraud had the priory church, which you will visit, built. It is one of the most beautiful feats of Romanesque art: a single nave, with a vault span of 11.40 meters, it surpasses Maguelone (10 meters) and Saint-Guilhem (6 meters).

The church was consecrated on October 6, 1115, in a dazzling ceremony in the presence of 2 archbishops and 6 bishops. Numerous relics, including Christic relics, were placed in the three altars. The main altar is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist; the two other minor altars are dedicated, one to Saint Augustine and the Archangel Saint Michael by Raymond, bishop of Barbastro, the second minor altar to the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, James, and Saint Foy by Gautier, bishop of Maguelone.



Cassan became a necropolis of prime importance when, in 1154, **Raymond Trencavel** chose it as his burial site, followed by his son **Roger II** and his wife **Adelaïs de Burlats**, daughter of the Count of Toulouse Raymond V and Queen Constance; Raymond-Roger Trencavel, their son who died in his own dungeons of Carcassonne, was transferred to Cassan. Numerous high-ranking individuals, secular dignitaries, or members of the Church, followed this example during the 12th, 13th, and early 14th centuries.

At the very beginning of the 13th century, **Pope Innocent III directly linked Cassan to the Holy See**, and in terms of temporal affairs, Cassan was granted to the crown of France under **Louis IX** in 1268, hence its ancient title of «Royal Priory of Cassan.»

After a century and a half of independence, the Priory of Cassan came under the jurisdiction of the Abbot of Saint-Ruf in Avignon in 1364. In 1671, the Priory was attached to the Abbey of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris under the priorship of François Fouquet (bishop of Agde and then archbishop of Narbonne), brother of the Superintendent of Finances of Louis XIV.

From 1754 to 1758, the magnificent palace was built by **the Commendatory Prior François Pas de Beaulieu**. Designed by Genovese architects, various regional master builders participated in its construction. The palace, a pure marvel, was enhanced with terraced gardens; the small pavilion known as the billiards pavilion was built at the back of the orchard a little later for the leisure of the already limited religious community.

The church was modified in 1788: the three apses of the choir were replaced by a single apse. The Romanesque capitals were recut in the Corinthian style, except for the first four, which remain in their Romanesque majesty.

The canons were expelled at the Revolution, and the estate was sold in 1790; it was Marc-Antoine-Thomas Mérigeaux, a lawyer in Pézenas, who bought it indirectly on behalf of

the Prince of Conti, who lodged his mistress, Madame de Brimont, there.

The estate then took on the name of Château de Cassan. It subsequently passed through various hands, including those of winemakers who devastated the church, converting it into a vat, press, and wine cellar.

In 1946, Cassan became a training center, a technical college for Household Arts in 1947, then a center for the insertion and promotion of young workers from Overseas Territories in 1978 until 1985; finally, a circus school ended up further damaging the estate during its occupation from 1987 to 1995.

In 1995, Cassan returned to private hands, which endeavored to heal its wounds and resurrect this historic site. Since 1953, various decrees have classified Cassan: the church, the main 18th-century body with its facades and roofs, including its terraces, ironwork, and south wing, are listed in the additional inventory of Historic Monuments.

For the writing of this history of Cassan, particularly from the second millennium onwards, we were largely inspired by texts kindly made available to us by Mr. Serge Sotos and references to the work of Mr. Alfred Crouzat, 1859, and Mr. Albert Fabre, 1894.



Visitor's Guide

Reception Hall (departure)

The frescoes in the shop were created by Michel Deguil based on documented research. At the entrance to the reception hall, leading into the courtyard, you can see a square tower and traces of fortified walls erected in the 14th century during periods of turmoil and wars.



The flanking tower, originally round, was topped with a square dovecote in the 15th century. In 1732, a wrought-iron bell tower was installed to house Cassan's last bell, dating from 1549! This tower was transformed into a water tower during the era of the technical college in 1947.

It is adjacent to the south wing, known as the «**host building**,» an old hospital-hostelry built in the 12th century by Saint Guiraud; the poor and passing pilgrims would come here for care and to find food and comfort. This south wing, a private part of the estate, is not open to visitors.

Courtyard of Honor

Previously, the first cloister was enclosed on all four sides. The palace that replaced it, built in the 18th century, opened up its eastern side. Thus, the courtyard opens onto the perspective of the cloister gardens and the palace facades. The courtyard of honor was planted with plane trees and acacias, poorly distributed and tormented. The removal of several subjects was necessary, but it will be followed by the opening of archaeological digs; indeed, the location of the courtyard contains numerous traces of buildings and enclosures, built and rebuilt. Some parts of the courtyard also served as a burial ground during the time of Saint-Guiraud's hospital.

North Wing (Annex to the Right of the Shop)

These buildings housed Cassan's stables in the 19th century. They are not open for visits and are used for workshops and catering space. Under the floor – in «pure 1947» tiling – coffin tombs made of stone slabs were discovered during the passage of pipelines. Pilgrims who died on their return from Santiago de Compostela, identifiable by the scallop shells on their chests, rested here.

Garden of the Old Cloister



Located on the south side near the herbalist shop, originally a medieval garden of medicinal plants. In the middle, the pool did not exist in the 18th century; it was added in the 19th century, reconstructed from the borders of two basins located in the French garden on the west side. The low wall marks the east the former position of the fourth side of the medieval cloister. During the 2008 INRAP archaeological dig campaign, the foundations of the old cloister were uncovered, revealing the remains of a monumental medieval monastic complex. Many burials were discovered in the galleries of the old cloister. An old conventual building, of which only the foundations remain, seems to have been built along with the church in 1115.

Two wells are present in the garden. The rainwater collection system then channels it downstream of the estate through aqueducts under the castle. The main entrance of the castle is adorned with an iconographic representation of the «Nemean Lion» above the door, which invites humility by its crushed posture.



The Lantern of Hope

From the cloister garden, gaze at it under the sun! It remains difficult to access through what's left of the old bell tower. Tradition holds that a continuous fire was kept burning at night to guide pilgrims to the monastery; this fire symbolized the immortality of the soul and signaled the illustrious necropolis of Cassan. The lantern has six windows, twelve ventilation holes with geometric shapes; it is topped with a chimney that has twelve bays. A basaltic rock elevates it, and stone spheres decorate its openings in an arch: a jewel of ornamentation.



Follow our signage and take the path between the boxwoods to enter the herbalist shop.

The Herbalist Shop

Under a ribbed vaulted ceiling with a hanging and sculpted key, the herbalist shop has also been reconstructed. At the time of the first cloister, potions, ointments, balms, and remedies were prepared here from medicinal plants grown from the «simples»



in the southern part of the cloister garden; the canons helped and treated the sick in the adjacent hospices of the monastery.

The Kitchen



It has been reconstructed and decorated (according to a 17th-century inventory). Only the rib vault on corner pillars, the typically Languedocian chimney with its inverted ship's hull hood, and the front of the bread oven made of lava stone remained. Some utensils have extraordinary names!

The oven has been rebuilt. During the events hosted by Cassan, the kitchen provides a perfect setting for culinary products.

The Grand Staircase



The vouîtes plates, of the masonry and ironwork is superb. This structure is remarkable from a stereotomic point of view: the steps, worn by passage, form a suspended staircase with flat vaults, rising more than four meters to reach the upper gallery, adorned with some plasterwork decorate the ceilings.



At Cassan, **all floors are inaccessible for safety reasons** and have not been renovated, but 500 tons of debris were cleared in 2003.

The Costume Room

Imagine these costumes worn during sparkling evenings hosted by the Priors of the 18th century.

In the south vestibule, **do not exit towards the park**; not yet... but notice a Carrara marble fountain, created by Carlo Panzetta, placed in 1785. This fountain was formerly designated by a word reserved for religious vocabulary, in Latin «lavabo»: I will wash... and naturally finds its place at the threshold of the dining room.



The Four Enfilade Salons The Dining Room

As per the rule, there was no fireplace in the dining rooms.



The wood paneling is classified, carefully sculpted in bas-relief with acanthus leaves, bringing warmth and comfort. We use this dining room for tastings or group meals.

That's why everything is rather simple and efficient.

The dining room can accommodate up to 30 guests arranged around the main table in the center and four other round tables. The magic of this room and its exquisite proportions, the atmosphere of discretion and refinement that the essence of walnut confers on it, work wonders.

The Small Library Salon



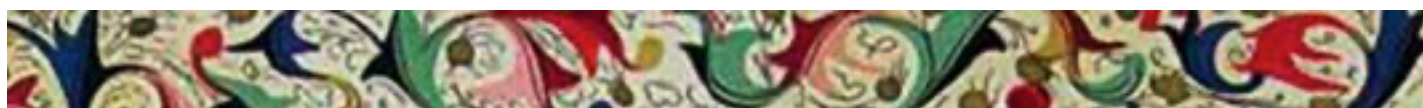
A magnificent Louis XVI fireplace in gray marble from Faugères with a monolithic top, stolen during the circus school's time, found and reinstalled... Woodwork in the style of the grand salon you will see later. Floors plundered to be reconstructed. Above the doors, we have painted biblical scenes related to vine and wine. Noah's first fermentation, the father of the vineyard, «Moses's emissaries returning from the promised land with giant bunches of grapes,» the wedding at Cana.

The Central Vestibule

It commands the gallery, the enfilade salons on either side, and access to the garden terraces. Simple and classic with its original plasterwork, with pilasters and Greek friezes, reminiscent of ancient peristyles. It is closed to the west by a wrought iron gate with volutes encircling fleur-de-lys. We invite you to rest on the sofas we have placed there for your comfort. Due to drafts, we keep the doors closed during the visit; access to the gardens is through the north vestibule.

The Grand Music Salon

It expresses the opulence of the commendatory priors who, it is said, did not pray but collected tithes and led lavish lives to the extent that they made it a «royal» way at the Revolution. The polychrome parquets are classified; the noble woods that compose them are lemon tree, rosewood, walnut, and mahogany. The fireplaces adorned with acanthus leaves are classic. The woodwork, typically neoclassical, is original. The decorations feature palm fronds or laurel crowns; the pilasters are wisely fluted.



and topped with Ionic capitals; the door transoms depict the seasons. This salon, which regularly hosts recitals, is lightly furnished. Michel Deguil is the author of the panoramic frescoes. They capture the environmental themes of the Priory: the sheepfold, the grape harvest, the downstream river known as the Thongue. Along the banks of the Thongue River, in the 17th century, the Bishops of Béziers exploited a natural oil spring that floated on the water. The priors of Cassan sold this «Gabian oil» in vials, as a remedy.



Then there's the famous piano of Madame de Brimont: a contemporary piano but designed like her harpsichord, made as a unique piece. It is regularly used by pianists during recitals.

Madame de Brimont is said to sit here sometimes. Many have felt the brush of her long veils or heard the rustle of her satin dress; her gentle rose scent sometimes perfumes the salon.

It is said that the ghost of Madame de Brimont, the mistress of the Prince de Conti (who, behind the scenes, was one of Cassan's illustrious owners for his Belle), haunts the salons of Cassan on certain full moon nights. It is said she still rages in the labyrinth under the staircase and that, calmed by a handsome prince or more often by a holy man humming a tune, she sits at the salon's piano and lulls the palace with all the airs of the ages, learned over the centuries from all her knights...

The Bishops' Chamber

This reconstruction pays tribute to the place

the Prior reserved for passing dignitaries. Its fireplace is made of marble, known as red griotte with partridge eye, from the quarries of Caunes Minervois in Aude. This marble was highly appreciated by architects and was a favored material in prestigious buildings. Imagine you are «Monseigneur.» After a splendid reception held in your honor, the evening prayer finished, you are lying on the Polish bed, dreaming... let yourself be carried away...



Cassan are arranged in the small south vestibule that provides access to the gardens, which we invite you to finish exploring.

We invite you to take the north vestibule, exit, and head towards the park. For people with reduced mobility (PRM), the exterior access is through the church.

The West Facade Overlooking the Gardens

Nineteen rows of windows on three levels make it the largest 18th-century facade in Languedoc. Legend has it that Cassan has as many windows as there are days in the year. Currently, we count 306 throughout the estate, but many buildings have been razed. A pure marvel of harmony, this facade showcases all the talent of the Genovese architects who managed to banish any feeling of uniformity. This result was achieved by gradually reducing, from bottom to top, the size of the windows, varying the design of





their supports and by skillfully playing with projections. To the strongly marked lateral avant-corps, a centrally positioned body in very slight relief, richly decorated, responds; this elegant arrangement gives the ensemble an air of an Italian palace. The stone used is a variegated sandstone from a quarry in Gabian, for which the canons reserved exclusive use; under the setting sun, it dresses in pastel tones ranging from pink to golden brown.

The facade covers a good third of the church's facade. There is no conflict but a scholarly marriage between these two epochs separated by 600 years.

At its southern end, a building made of concrete and bricks, added in the 1950s, brought modern sanitary comfort to the college's boarders at the time.

The Rest Garden, the Vegetable Garden, and the Orchard to the South (not open to visit)

Pleasantly planted with Italian cypresses arranged in rotundas, the rest garden invites meditation. It oversees the vegetable garden and orchard that stretch to the south alongside the terraced gardens on one side and the vineyards on the slope of Sainte-Marthe hill on the other.

The orchard ends with the pavilion known as «the billiard room» where the religious community would come to play and relax with its guests.

We invite you to walk along the high path overlooking

the park,

to detach yourself from the western facade and appreciate its majesty. Also, a time to appreciate the renovation of its roof on the main body (construction site in 2018). This project restored its rainwater downspouts and its finials of glazed terracotta; in the 18th century, a Languedocian know-how in the territory of St Jean-de-Fos.

As for the balustrade crowning the central body, it was cleaned and its acroterion vases restored.

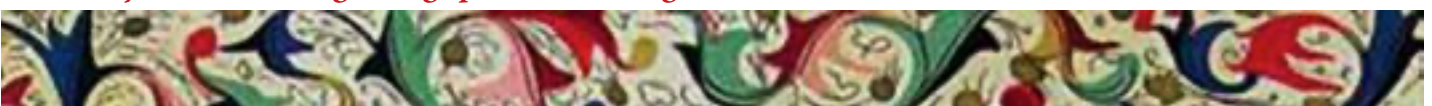


In the northwest part of the park, a decorative element resembling a small dovecote was



built in the 19th century by the heirs of Madame de Brimont. It can also be seen as a crude pastiche of the lantern overlooking the church.

Now, we invite you to discover the wonderful romanesque church.





The Exterior of the Church, Its North Facade, and the Cemetery

Facing you, the facade of the church, altered several times, narrates a thousand years of history; at the foot of the church, to the left of the ramp, are monolithic baptismal fonts in worked stone. One of the basins, resembling a monumental capital, is adorned at its corners with volutes symbolizing a ram's head. It was located inside the church and was likely equipped with a lid. The other object is actually a 12th-century ossuary decorated with quincunxes and balls. The bones were piled up by the canons during the exhumation of graves to make room for others. They are cataloged and classified as Historical Monuments.

By walking around the church on your right you enter the shaded and cool north area. There, under your feet, lies the cemetery. The departmental road that borders Cassan, built in 1840, crosses it.

In 2011, a preventive excavation campaign of the cemetery conducted by INRAP, outside the walls of Cassan, led to the discovery of 162 graves. Four pilgrim graves were found with individuals bearing scallop shells, a reference to the use of this insignia as a symbol of pilgrimage or devotion to Saint James.

The north facade of the church has undergone few modifications since the 12th century. All its ornamentation is of a funerary type. The «door of the dead,» elevated, bears on its tympanum a Latin inscription exhorting repentance. On the buttress, an animal represents earthly life; on the other side, a little higher, an anchored cross surrounded by solar discs represents hope in the resurrection. Between the two, a console once held a box of ashes, reminding of the passage to dust before the resurrection. This console is richly decorated with the symbol of the Trinity through three stages of the vine; the bud, the flower, and the fruit; the vine gives wine, the symbol of Christ's blood shed to wash away sin and prepare for the resurrection.

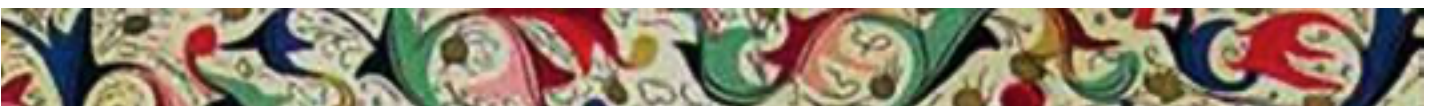
We invite you to enter the Romanesque church of Cassan via the wooden access ramp.

The Priory Church

The single nave emerges; it casts its vault over a span of 11.40 meters and a length of 43 meters! The vault's keystone reaches 15 meters high! For comparison, the vault span of Maguelone Cathedral is 10 meters, and the Abbey of Gellone (Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert) is 6 meters.



The horizontal thrusts on the walls are enormous: to solve this problem, the architects of the time used the technique of wall loading. Thus, unlike Gothic churches, there is no framework above the Romanesque vault but a filling of Stones and debris under a stone roof, later further loaded and covered with tiles.



In this way, 2,400 tonnes are above your head, lifted by religious fervor at a rate of 300 tonnes per bay. This weight adds to the inherent weight of the walls, 2 to 3 meters thick on the gallery side and the buttresses to the north, as if to pin them vertically into the ground and prevent them from moving under the forces of separation. The horizontal thrusts at the vault's crown are thus controlled.

The measure of the place, the construction grid of the church, its ratios, and its harmonics were established by Raymond Montery following a long study conducted throughout the year 2003. You will find further details on these later, at the end of the booklet. Cassan has not finished revealing its secrets and speaking to us.



Above your heads at the level of the vault's crown and right above each transverse arch, the capitals run. Observe the imposing mass of the first four original Romanesque capitals, as they inspire strength and respect through their simplicity, as the semi-engaged columns seem to flow from the sky, calmy, for nearly

1000 years towards the kneeling men. By miracle, these four capitals and their shafts escaped being recut in the Corinthian style, which occurred in the 18th century during the construction of the castle.

In the 12th century, the church had a bell tower on the north side, which was destroyed after the revolution. Originally, it did not end in a single apse but with a main apse flanked by two very small apsidioles to the north and south, symbolizing the Holy Trinity. Excavations carried out in 1985 and 1987 revealed the foundations of the apsidioles, which can be clearly distinguished on the ground at the level of the choir.

Anthropomorphic tombs were discovered in

the church's choir. The tomb of Pierre Amiel, archbishop of Narbonne and former canon of Cassan, was located very close to the Romanesque high altar. To the right of the choir against the cloister, there is still a well.

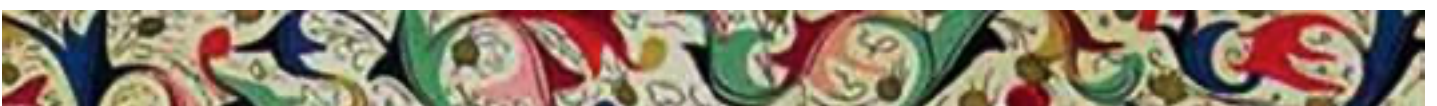


Tomb statue of Guillaume VI Durand, now on display at the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse.

Cassan was a very large necropolis as the reputation of the holy men was immense for more than two centuries. Prayers for the redemption of souls were more effective if one could rest as close as possible to the places of devotion. The dead were buried to the north of the church. The bodies of the canons were symbolically passed through «the door of the dead,» without being accompanied by the living who went around to retrieve them and bury them. The door of the dead invites contemplation as well as repentance.

But with so many marvels, what outrages! Pilasters torn off to put wine barrels, holes in the walls to install mezzanine beams, a vaulted ceiling blackened by the vapors of winemaking fermentations, no more stained glass, the soil whose moisture gnaws at the walls, piled up outside up to the windows to dump the grapes, plundered floors, no more doors, no altar or stalls, scattered in the surrounding churches, so many wounds to heal!

We have begun the renovation of the church: The Carrara marble floor conforms to that planned by the Genovese. We have installed low-temperature underfloor heating, architectural lighting, and sound systems; there is still much to do (pilasters, walls, doors, stained glass...).



Exit the church through the door leading into the castle..

The grand gallery is before you, still as beautiful, with its grand ceremonial staircase at the very end, to the south. To your right is the «1947» staircase. To your left, the North vestibule and its fresco of the Virgin with Child.

Facing You: The «1947» Staircase

In 1947, a competition questioned how to create an additional access to the floors. The most convoluted passage possible was created to enter the salons, installing it in front of the doors to the enfilade salons!

The North Gallery (to the left of the church exit)

A fireplace on your left marks the modifications the 19th century brought to Cassan, following an inheritance that split the place in two.

Cadastré napoléonien de 1833



Documented in the 1833 cadaster, the division of the estate into two parts, even extending into the park with an east-west wall, thankfully no longer exists today. The heir of the North wing had to build a new kitchen and, by doing so, remodeled the access to the church. Move past it...

The Fresco of the Virgin with Child

In January 2007, a prodigious treasure was revealed to us: following the clearing of the walled exits of the church in the gallery, a painting adorning the top of the canonical door was rediscovered after two and a half centuries of forgetfulness but also preservation.



This Virgin with Child, known as in Majesty, characteristic of Byzantine art and its successors, features remarkable work on the folds of the tunic, astonishing in their realism.

The observation of the painting and its support suggests it was executed in giornata, characteristic of fresco painting. A series of samples, analyzed by a laboratory (C.I.C.R.P.), revealed the presence of aerinite, a mineral pigment with the only known mine located in Spain, near Huesca. Identified in the famous mural decorations of Taüll and the Val de Boí, it was widely used at the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th.



The face of the left angel, the only one particularly well-preserved, presents shadows sharply defined by brown earths. Note the folds on the neck of the Virgin and the angel, Eastern symbols of wealth and good health, characteristic of Byzantine art. The creation of the work likely dates between 1115, the consecration date of the church, and the very beginning of the 13th century.

As in most Marian Majesties, there is a goldsmith's throne framed by two archangels. The backdrop they support is of Eastern inspiration (Lion, elephant, and bird of prey can be discerned). The angels' garments are distinctly Byzantine in style.



At the bottom of the composition, a legend, partially readable: «QVI TOLLIT»... This can be related to the phrase «Ecce agnus dei qui tollit peccata mundi» (Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world).

La grande galerie



You are now viewing the grand gallery: a perspective over 60 meters long! Admire the light provided by its twelve bays of windows under its basket-handle vault. Facing east, the morning sun plays in regular brushes here. In the afternoon, light only penetrates by bouncing off the eastern sky; the light is then soft, and the gallery remains cool.

You can now discover the exhibition present in the gallery, then access the cloister courtyard to exit the monument.

Cassan in the 20th Century

After the 1939-1945 war, the priory was acquired by the French State.

1946 – 1975

The Ministry of National Education established a Technical College of Household Arts for young girls. Creation of the sanitary block extension on the west face (brick building).

1953

A decree classifies the priory as a Historic Monument. The castle, including terraces, ironworks, and the south wing, is listed in the supplementary inventory of Historic Monuments.

1978 – 1986

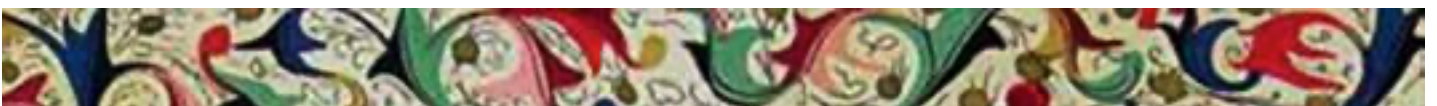
Made available to the Ministry of Overseas Departments and Territories, which turned it into one of its three centers of the National Agency for the Insertion of Young Workers from Overseas.

1987 – 1995

The School of Circus Arts took up residence.

Depuis 1995

Cassan returned to private ownership.



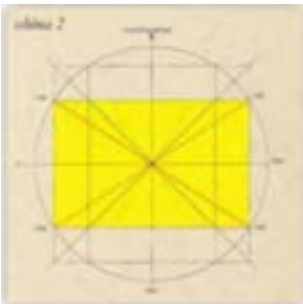
The layout of the church

The actual studies conducted by Raymond Montery, reveal that the designs of temples, since time immemorial, have all adhered to precise rules regarding their orientation and geometry. These rules are based on the geodetic characteristics of the site and the path of the sun. The study of a site first involves recording its latitude, longitude, and then mapping from Geographic North to Solar Noon. These initial measurements allow for establishing the sunrise and sunset positions, which represent the maximum and minimum solar sweep for the year at the given location.

For Cassan, this sweep between the two solstices is 66° . The angle formed by the sunrise on the summer solstice day, relative to Geographic North, is 57° .



The geometric construction of these data reveals the solstitial quadrilateral in dotted lines, the first geometry of the place (Diagram 1).



The proportion of the Solstitial Quadrilateral is specific to the site. For Cassan, this proportion ratio is 1.54. It thus forms the elementary base of the site's geometry, used to proportion the building and thus give it

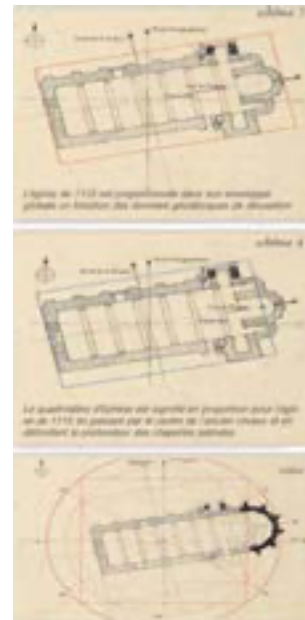
a form in harmony with the site. By vertically flipping the solstitial quadrilateral, one can trace and calculate the site's grid (Diagram 2).

It is 6 for Cassan and through successive divisibility of 12 - 24 - 48, etc... The Grid acts as a canvas the architect uses to organize the constructed space, both in the plan and elevation, while respecting the specifics of the terrain on which the building is erected.

At Cassan, the geodetic characteristics generate through geometry the quadrilaterals of Jerusalem but also of Ephesus (Diagram 3).

Ephesus, an Ionian colony located on the divide between the East and the West, reached its peak under Emperor Augustus.

The Temple of Artemis was among the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul stayed



there three years during his third journey and founded a community. Tradition places the death of Apostle John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Ephesus. The 1963 excavations uncovered the Church of Saint John as well as the Church of the Virgin Mary, where the third ecumenical council was held in 431, convened by Theodosius II.

This council established as dogma the divine maternity of Mary, in reaction against Nestorianism (Diagram 3).



Activities at the Château

Businesses



Motivate your executives, enhance a work seminar, elevate your company's brand image, and impress your clients by hosting them in a prestigious location: we organize tailor-made stays and workshops around the themes of «oenology and gastronomy.»

The church, a furnished room of 460 m², can accommodate 500 people. It is available for organizing seminars and congresses. The terraced gardens, the cloister gallery (150 people), and the 5 salons are also available for the organization of your professional events.

For all information:

Tél.: +33 (0)4 67 245 245

info@chateau-cassan.com



The Association of Friends of the Royal Priory of Cassan

For those passionate about the site's history, architectural, or cultural riches, the Association of Friends of the Royal Priory of Cassan, a Law 1901 association, was founded.

The association lives and meets regularly. For any inquiries or membership requests, you will find a membership form at the reception.

The Association of Friends of the Royal Priory of Cassan is keen to see this beautiful project realized: to restore Cassan Priory's altar table!

Miraculously, the base of the Altar, in which numerous relics were deposited during its consecration in 1115, has come to us. The very beautiful Carrara marble altar table was likely repurposed for other uses, and the altar base has cried out in solitary despair for centuries.

In October 2015, for the commemoration ceremony of the 900 years of the consecration of Notre-Dame de Cassan, the mass was celebrated by Monseigneur Jean-Louis Bruguès, Father Henry Bérail, Father Bruno Pin, Father Gaby Radi.



We conducted bibliographic and museographic research on altar tables from the 11th century. Inspired by the rare documents of tables from the region, we designed a new table, following the principles of sacred geometry. The commemorative mass was said on a model table reproducing the design. Thanks to your support, the time has come to make this table in Carrara marble.



Setting up the main altar during the ceremony of the 900th anniversary of the church's consecration in October 2015.

We have drawn up the design of the table, and here are the results of the studies and the symbolism attached to it. The estimates have been prepared. We wish to combine the forces of many lovers of this site, rich in history and devotion, as soon as possible to pay a bit more homage and add even more soul to this place.



Layout of the Main Altar Table

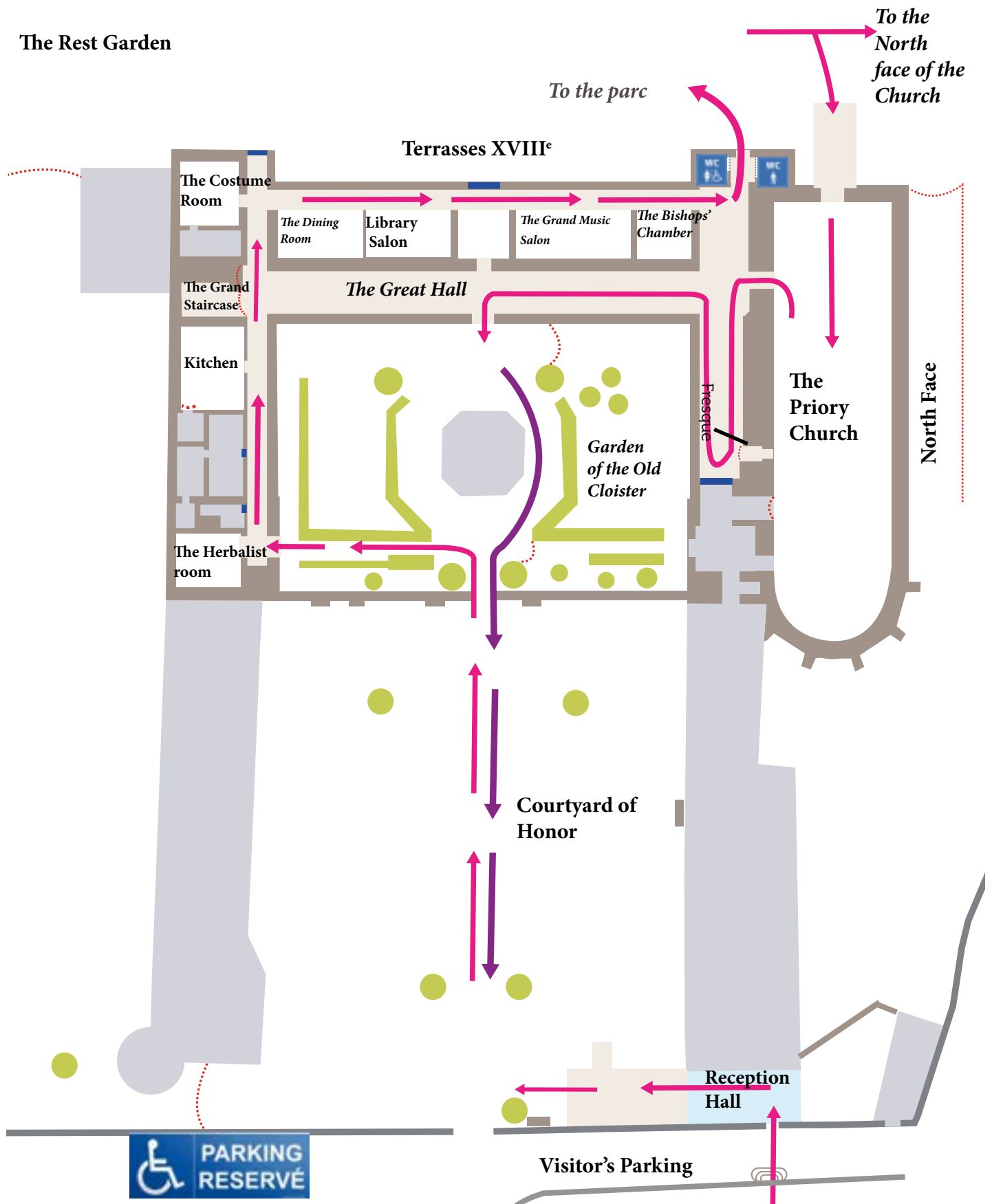
HOW TO SUPPORT THIS PROJECT?

We are collecting funds to manufacture the altar table: purchasing the Carrara marble, creating the 3D modeling, preparing the machining and tooling, the fine tuning by digital machining, the finishing in sculpture and hand engraving, the polishing. Then the protection of the table, its transport, and installation at Cassan.

Our reception staff can collect your donation by bank check made out to the Association of Friends of the Royal Priory of Cassan; we will provide you with a form to fill out, and the association will send you a receipt.



Visitor's Plan



Château-Abbaye de Cassan - 34320 Roujan

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The schedule of shows and activities can be viewed on our website.
 The Château de Cassan hosts your evenings - seminars - dinners in the priory church,
 the grand gallery, or outdoors - guided tours with meals.

