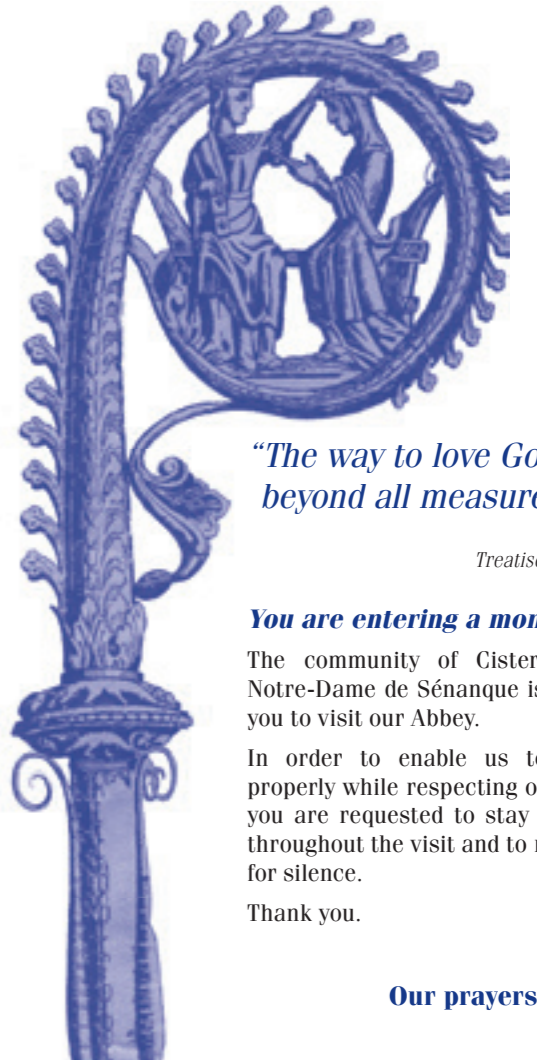




de Notre-Dame Sénanque Abbey



*“The way to love God is to love
beyond all measure.”*

*Saint Bernard
Treatise on the Love of God*

You are entering a monastery ...

The community of Cistercian monks of Notre-Dame de Sénanque is happy to allow you to visit our Abbey.

In order to enable us to welcome you properly while respecting our life of prayer, you are requested to stay with your guide throughout the visit and to respect the need for silence.

Thank you.

Our prayers are with you.

84220 GORDES - FRANCE

NOTRE-DAME DE SENANQUE ABBEY Cistercian Monastery

Services:

The liturgies celebrated by the monks are open to the public. Please respect our contemplation and prayer. Do not go in and out of the church during the service or take photos or video recordings. Please dress respectfully. There are no guided tours during services.

Mass:

Sundays and solemnities at 10am, Mondays at 8.30am,
Tuesday to Saturday at 11.45

Lauds Tuesday to Sunday at 7.45am, Monday at 8am.

Vespers 6pm every day.

Compline 8.15pm every day.

Spiritual retreats

People who wish to share the community's life of prayer and contemplation are welcomed in the monastery's guest quarters. Write to Frère Hôtelier (frere.hotelier@senanque.fr).

Religious bookshop

Bibles, monastic life, Catholic faith, Christian life, liturgy, religious history, liturgical records, Holy music, monastic and religious products, honey, lavender.
Products made at the Abbey: lavender essence, honey.
Online: www.senanque.fr

Guided tours

The community allows visits to the 12th-century buildings accompanied by a guide. Several one-hour guided tours are run, in French, throughout the day. Numbers are limited. You can book ahead by writing or at the abbey itself. Guided tours are strictly for individuals: groups can only be hosted if they reserve in advance (special conditions apply).

Sunday and solemnities: guided tours in the afternoon only. From the 12th of November to the end of January: closed in the morning. The Abbey is closed to visitors in the second and third weeks of January and on Good Friday, Christmas Day and days and times required for the correct functioning of monastic life, and also on days when weather conditions do not permit proper access.

Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque - 84220 Gordes, France
Community: +33 (0)4 90 72 02 05
Bookshop and guided tours: +33 (0)4 90 72 05 86

www.senanque.fr

A little history...

Nine hundred years ago, a movement for spiritual rebirth, which began in the Abbey of Cîteaux, the New Monastery in Burgundy, became the basis for the foundation of more than seven hundred Cistercian monasteries in Europe during the Middle Ages. Saint Bernard was the figurehead of the new monastic order. The Cistercian monks, united by simplicity and the observation of the Rule of Saint Benedict (6th century) found their strength through a life of prayer and work in their abbeys. These monasteries are always to be found in remote places, as is the case for Sénanque.

*Communal life revolves around the **seven services** held each day, ranging from the middle of the night until the following evening. The monks do manual work, mainly agricultural. They are helped by lay brothers.*

1148 Foundation of Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey by Cistercian monks who came from Mazan Abbey in the Vivarais (Ardèche, France). Construction lasted about 60 years.

1178 Consecration of the church by the Bishop of Cavaillon. In the Abbey, the church was the first place erected after the temporary accommodation buildings.

13th to 14th centuries The monastery reached its peak, with four mills, seven granges and large areas of land in Provence.

1509 First commendatory abbot.

1544 The Wars of Religion. The monastery is devastated and the lay brothers' quarters destroyed.

1791 Revolution. The Abbey is sold off as state property.

1854 Purchase and restoration of the Abbey by Dom Barnouin, a new community of Cistercian monks of the Immaculate Conception arrives.

1903 New laws on religious congregations: the monks are expelled from the monastery.

1926 Normal monastic life is re-established

1969 The monks leave for the headquarters of St Honorat on the island of Lerins near Cannes. Sénanque serves as a cultural center for most of the next two decades.

1988 A new wave of vocations at Lerins Abbey sends a small community of monks to Sénanque, this renewing the centuries-old Cistercian tradition.

1998 850th anniversary of the foundation of the Abbey of Sénanque.

Our resources

Work

Ora et labora: Pray and work. The Rules of Saint Benedict, by which we are guided, encourages monks to work. Today, whether performing farming work (growing lavender, cultivating a vegetable garden, fruit trees, olive trees, etc.), making honey or maintaining buildings or the valley, the monks work and help preserve and harness the value of the heritage passed down to them by their predecessors.

Accommodation



Thanks to the monastic hotel services, the Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey can offer spiritual retreats in which it hosts people seeking prayer, silence, listening and rest. By taking part these hosts also help meet the Abbey's requirements.

Donations

With complete discretion, people provide precious support to the Sénanque community. These people may be friends, regulars, anonymous donors, etc. and their contributions are received with deep gratitude. Whether modest or mighty, there is no such thing as a small donation. Everyone contributes as much as they can. And it is just as important to be in everyone's prayers.

Store, book shop, tours

Thanks to a religious and cultural book shop and monastic and regional products, the Abbey's store generates a large part of the revenue needed to maintain and renovate the Abbey. It is also a place where people can pray and discover the monastic life. The same is true of the guided tours of the old monastery buildings.



Restoring and preserving heritage

In order to maintain the quality and beauty of the site bequeathed to us by our predecessors, the monastic community of Notre-Dame de Sénanque intends carrying out extensive construction work:

- restoration of the interior of the abbey church (heating, lighting, liturgical furniture, stonework, etc.)
- make the whole site accessible to all visitors



- and: undergrounding electrical lines, introducing safety facilities for the Sheep Pen (to welcome some groups), sanitation, etc.

The Abbey Church – making the beauty of the stones help prayer

This is an ambitious project that aims to conserve the magnificent architectural testimony and the original vocation of the Sénanque Abbey Church, which is to celebration liturgy services. First, it is necessary to renovate the whole building and the stone masonry, restore stone paving throughout the church and rebuild the stone staircase to the dormitory in the way that was initially intended. It is also necessary to restore stone liturgical furniture (altar, etc.) and to make all the furniture out of wood, including stalls, lectern, seats, pews, rostrum. Lastly, some of the woodwork needs to be refurbished.



If you would like to help us, you can send us a cheque made payable to the 'Fondation des Monastères'.

Address: Père Prieur (The Prior), Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque, 84220 Gordes, France

You can help us carry out the work needed to maintain the quality and beauty of Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey, a place of monastic life, and host more people intent on answering their calling.

DONATION FORM

- to be completed and sent back with your donation of :

€

please make cheques payable to “Fondation des Monastères” (Monasteries Foundation)

and, on the back, specify “pour l'Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque”

Title: _____

Surname: _____

Forename: _____

Full address: _____

Signature :

I send my contribution to:

Père Prieur

**Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque
84220 Gordes, France**

Nestling at the bottom of the valley, Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey is one of the purest examples of Cistercian architecture and way of life. A community of Cistercian monks, having returned in 1988, lives and prays in Sénanque.

This is the community that welcomes you today.

The monks' dormitory

The monks' dormitory ❶ is about 30 metres long and 9 metres wide. It is covered by a lancet arched vault divided into three unequal parts by two transverse arches. The cornices, at the top of the wall and the base of the vault, helped to support the wooden centring that was used during the construction of the vault.



A rose window and another plain window were inserted into the west wall. It is believed that subsequent work weakened the building and caused the dislodgement of some of the stones in the vault that can be seen today. Another theory is that the stones were dislodged by an earthquake (perhaps the one in 1909?).

The monks' dormitory could accommodate around 30 monks, who would sleep fully clothed on straw beds on the floor.

The layout of the Abbey was completely designed around the monks' life of continual prayer and the community liturgy. Accordingly, the dormitory was built as a continuation of the church's transept. The monks used to leave their dormitory at 2am for the first prayer of the day. *"I get up in the middle of the night to praise you for your righteous judgements."* Psalm 119.

Similarly, in the evening they went straight to their sleeping quarters after the last prayer.

Today each monk sleeps in a cell and follows more or less the same routine of worship as his predecessors' in the Middle Ages.

The dormitory is the only room that is no longer used for anything by the community.

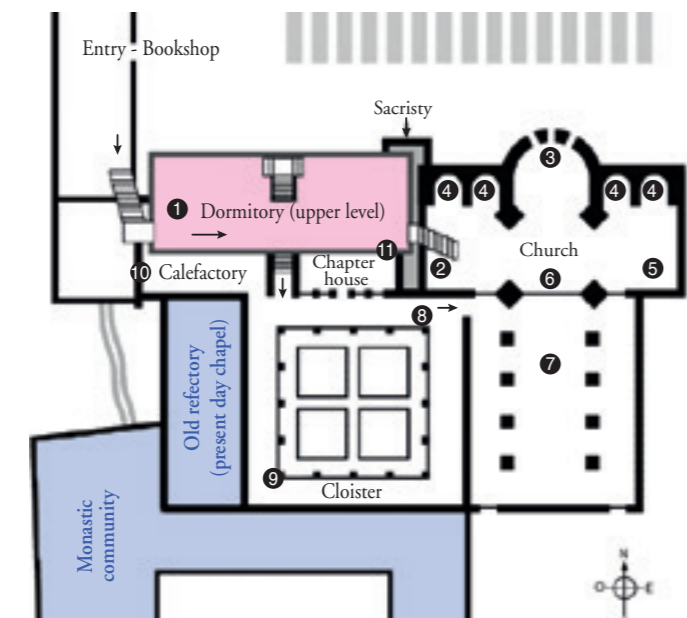
The cloister

Leave the dormitory by going down the stairs in the middle of the room - "the daytime stairs". This takes you to the cloister. This forms the centre of the Abbey. An enclosed area, it serves as a throughway connecting the various parts of the monastery but above all it is a place for meditation and reading. Near the church door you can see the old *armarium* ❸ – a cupboard for storing manuscripts. The cloister is an enclosed courtyard, surrounded by four galleries, each featuring twelve arches and leading to an ornamental garden.



Here, too, austerity is in evidence: the capital of each column is simply decorated with flora motifs.

From the southern gallery ❹ you can clearly see the church bell tower. The style is typically Romanesque, as is the lauze roof (dry flagstone assembled without using scaffolding). The remains of a fountain, which was pulled down during the Wars of Religion (16th century), can be seen in the vaulting of the south-western corner.



The Abbey Church

Enter the church ❻ by the western side. Go up the two steps on your left to reach the transept ❷, from where you can see the main apse ❸, which is illuminated by three openings that converge around the altar. The main apse is flanked by two typically Romanesque apse chapels ❹. Each chapel was used for private masses or services (such as a memorial masses for a benefactor).



Facing you on the east wall there are two small windows and a large oculus with wheel adornments ❺. Below this is the tomb and funerary monument to Geoffrey of Vénasque, Sénanque's benefactor. Above, at the transept crossing, the vault rises into a cupola ❻ resting on four squinches: four small half-dome vaults, featuring arches with six foils, creating a link between the square crossing of the transept and the octagon at the top of the cupola.

Stonemason marks: *On the stones the engraved signs and initials bear witness to the fact that the monks got help in building the Abbey by stonemason who marked the blocks in order to get paid. Several hundred of these marks can be seen at Sénanque.*



You should head into the nave ❽ in order to gain a full appreciation of the church, which is typically Cistercian in its extreme simplicity. No decoration can be allowed to distract the monks from prayer and contemplation. Only light, a symbol of God, is permitted to regulate the space. The choir monks used to sit in stalls in the first part of the nave, near the choir, while lay brothers occupied the section in the far end of the nave. The lay brothers entered the church through the rear side doors.

The church was reserved above all for the use of the monastic community but today it is open to the secular community for worship and religious ceremonies.

You will note that there is no main doorway, an omission that is very rare.

The Warming Room or Calefactory

This tiny vaulted room is supported by four groined vaults, culminating into a robust column, whose capital is adorned with water-leaves and *fleurs de lys*. There is also a splendid conical chimney, built so that upright tree trunks could be burned whole. The room originally had two chimneys, as can be seen by the presence of two chimney pots that are visible from the outside.



As the name suggests, this was the only heated room in the monastery apart from the kitchen. The monks would come to this room ❿ to work. It was used as a scriptorium, a place where manuscripts were copied.

The Chapter house

The Chapter House ❶ is where the monastic community gathers every day around the Abbot to listen to a reading from The Rule of Saint Benedict, which has 73 chapters. This is the only room in which talking is permitted. This is where the monks take decisions relating to the community and decide on their clothing, make the monastic profession of faith and elect the Abbot.



The monks sit on stone benches. The Abbot is in the centre facing a demon's face sculpted into the cloister. This room is distinguished by its remarkable acoustics – the spoken word can be heard effortlessly thanks to the six stone ribs in the groined vault.

Monks

A community of Cistercian monks have been praying and working in Sénanque since 1148. For more than 850 years Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey has been bearing witness to the presence of God in our world. Specifically, witness is borne by men who have been rallied by the call of Christ to follow Him as closely as possible, giving this building its purpose. Throughout the ages the Sénanque community has endeavoured to stay faithful to its monastic vocation while embracing the era in which it lives. Our Cistercian life is based on three pillars: the liturgy; lecto divina and prayer; and work as part of communal life.



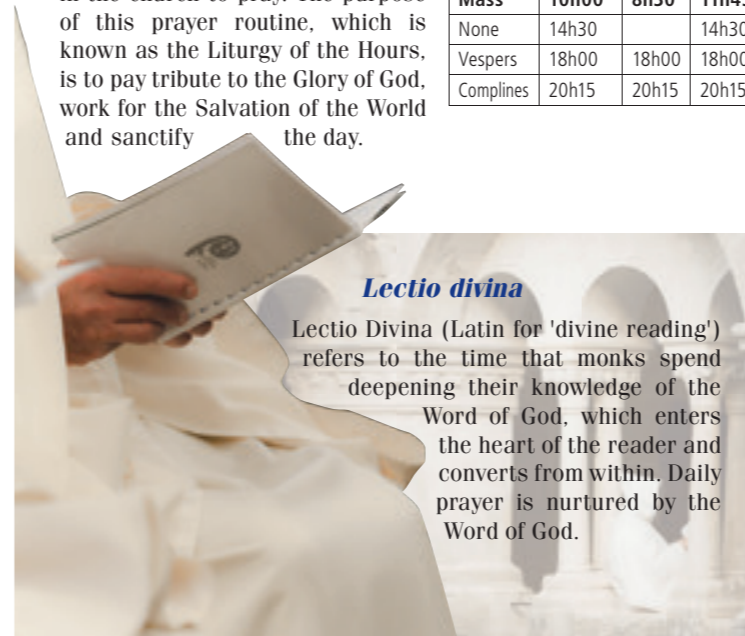
Liturgy

The liturgy service is the public worshipping of God and it structures to our existence. Seven times per day the community comes together in the church to pray. The purpose of this prayer routine, which is known as the Liturgy of the Hours, is to pay tribute to the Glory of God, work for the Salvation of the World and sanctify the day.

	Sunday	Monday	Weekday
Vigils	4h15	5h30	4h30
Lauds	7h45	8h00	7h45
Tierce			10h00
Sext	12h15		
Mass	10h00	8h30	11h45
None	14h30		14h30
Vespers	18h00	18h00	18h00
Complines	20h15	20h15	20h15

Lectio divina

Lectio Divina (Latin for 'divine reading') refers to the time that monks spend deepening their knowledge of the Word of God, which enters the heart of the reader and converts from within. Daily prayer is nurtured by the Word of God.



Work

Work is an integral part of our monastic life. The ultimate aim is not merely to make the community's daily bread but also to show the Glory of God through human activity. Work is a fraternal service carried out for the common good and the personal fulfilment of each brother.



"They are truly monks when they live by the work of their own hands"
(Rule of Saint Benedict)

Vocations

Monastic life is a calling. It is lived in response to God's call for holiness, to which everyone who has been baptised is committed, but monks follow it with special urgency and radicalness. It is the way of transfiguration. It is a monk's answer to the merciful love of Jesus, God made man. Today, as always, God calls young men to follow Him by becoming Cistercian monks in Notre-Dame de Sénanque.

To young men (aged 18 and over) who want to find out about Cistercian monastic life, the monastic community of Notre-Dame de Sénanque Abbey offers: a one-week retreat in which they can share the monastic life (prayer and work) with the support of a member of the community. This is scheduled for a time in the year that suits each individual.

Write a letter to Le Frère Hotelier, Abbaye Notre-Dame de Sénanque, 84220 Gordes, France.

