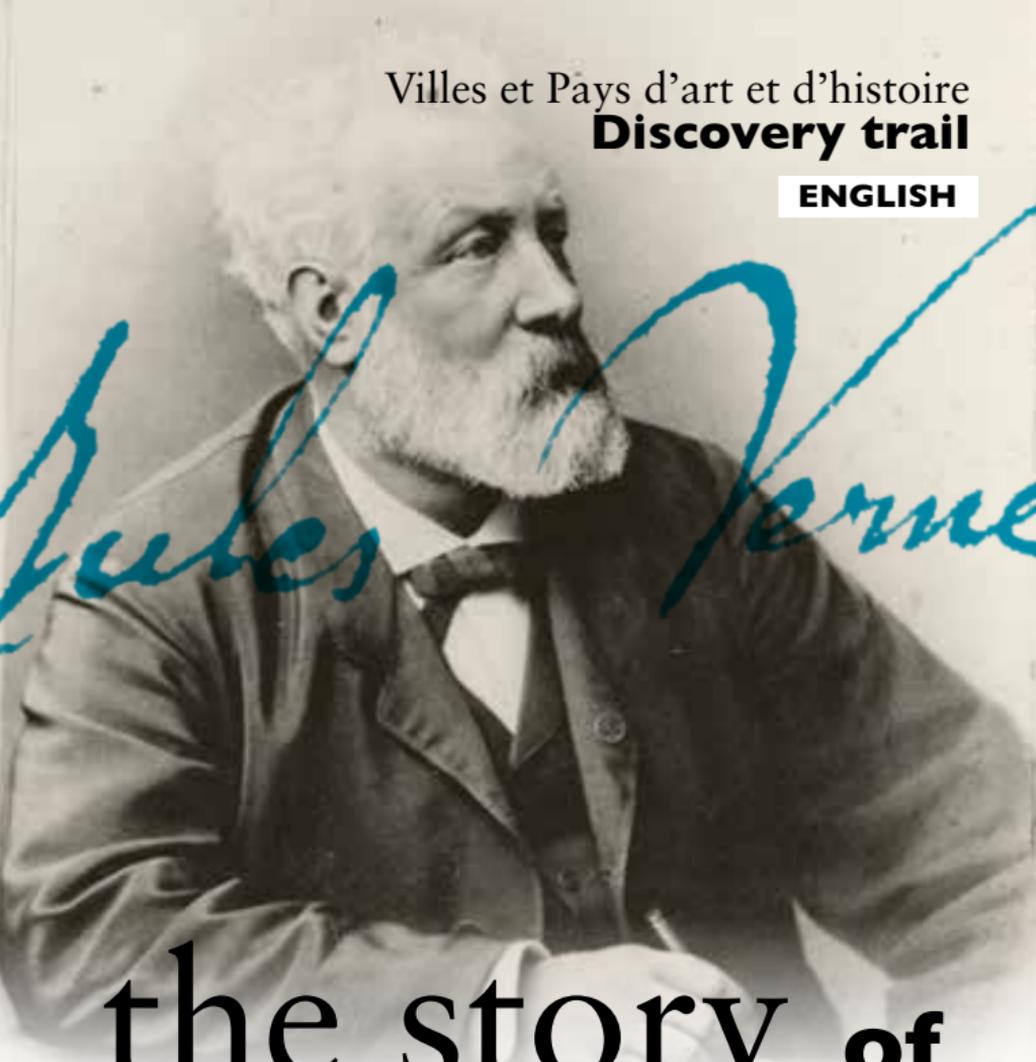


Villes et Pays d'art et d'histoire
Discovery trail

ENGLISH

Jules Verne



the story of

Nantes

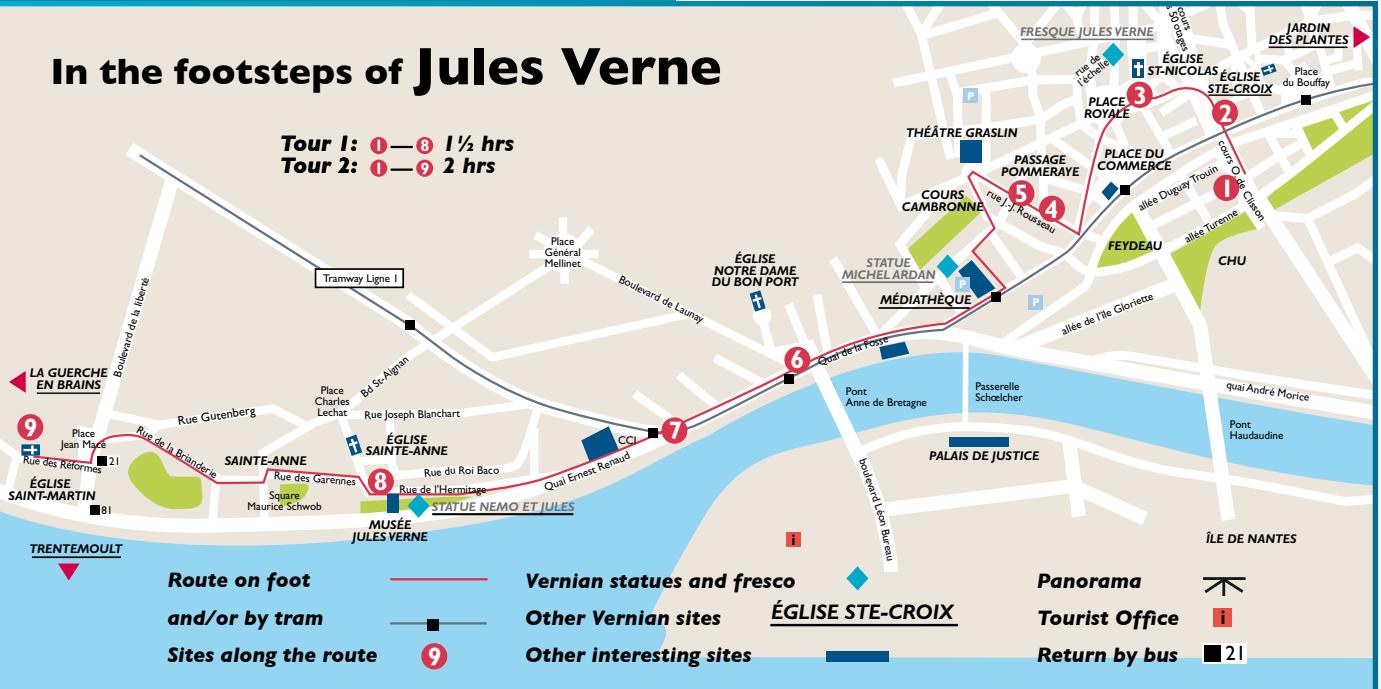
IN THE
FOOTSTEPS
OF

**JULES
VERNE**

VILLE DE
Nantes

In the footsteps of Jules Verne

Tour 1: ① — ⑧ 1 ½ hrs
Tour 2: ① — ⑨ 2 hrs



*There is this circumstance that I was born in Nantes, where I spent the whole of my childhood (...) »**

Jules Verne

Nantes, the islands and the Loire, the first mirror of his dreams, were the crucible for Jules Verne's writing. There we find the secret of a man and a writer who spoke to the imagination, the heart and the intelligence. Set off in his footsteps, be guided by his memories and those passed on to us by family tradition, and discover the places he frequented and which inspired him.

* Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from Jules Verne's *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* (Cahiers du Musée Jules Verne, Nantes, 1991) or the unpublished memoirs of his nephew, Raymond du Crest de Villeneuve, given to Nantes municipal library by Mr Antoine Pichelin.

NANTES, THE LOIRE AND JULES VERNE TOUR



La Poissonnerie, Nantes, on the easternmost tip of the island of Île Feydeau, where Jules Verne was born.



Pierre and Sophie Verne, Jules Verne's parents

① 4, cours Olivier de Clisson

The eldest son of Pierre Verne and Sophie Allotte de la Fuye, Jules Verne was born in Nantes on 8 February 1828, at 4, Rue Olivier de Clisson, and was christened at the Church of Sainte Croix, where his parents had married a year earlier. Thus he came into this world at the heart of Île Feydeau, between two branches of the Loire and at its confluence with the Erdre: an immense stone *Jangada*, a veritable *Floating City*, it is the first of many mysterious islands to appear in his novels.

② 2, allée Jean Bart (cours des Cinquante otages)

A year later, with the birth of his “beloved brother” Paul, the family moved to 2, Quai Jean Bart, near Pierre Verne’s legal practice. The Erdre thus continued to flow under the young Jules’s window. Close by is the shop *Au Rat goutteux* (The Gouty Rat), which years later would serve as inspiration for Verne’s philosophical tale *Adventures of the Rat Family*. The sign can still be seen at the corner of Cours des Cinquante Otages and Rue de la Barillerie.

Advertisement for the shop *Au Rat goutteux*



3 Église Saint-Nicolas

From 1844, Jules Verne was able to follow the building of the present-day Gothic Revival structure. His father belonged to the parish council that commissioned the building, and was one of the first subscribers. The old church, which leaned against the ramparts and had threatened collapse for over a century, served as the backdrop to Verne's first novel, which he never finished and was published by the City of Nantes in 1992 (*Un prêtre en 1839*, le cherche midi éditeur).

◆ Not far away, in Rue de l'Echelle, a fresco by Jean-Yves Jodeau depicting Jules Verne and his *Voyages Extraordinaires* was unveiled on 8 February 2008.

4 6, rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In 1840, the Verne family moved once again, this time to 6, Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Just raise your eyes and you will be able to picture the “circular living room [which] looked onto Rue Jean-Jacques and Rue Santeuil”. At the back of the apartment, Pierre Verne's solicitor's office “warrants a special description”.

“Three large bookcases covered three walls of Pierre Verne's office. The one on the left contained law books (...) alongside a complete collection of the Latin authors, poets, historians, and Greek authors (...)

To the right of the entrance, a fairly substantial bookcase, whose shelves contained editions of Musée des Familles, Magasin Pittoresque and Le Tour du Monde, accounts of voyages and discoveries, some of the oldest treatises on the same subjects; a veritable treasure trove for a child's curiosity (...)

These shelves were followed by others containing books on ancient and modern history and many journals. Lastly, a two-piece glass-fronted bookcase contained collections of the French authors (...), English authors (...) and many Italian authors (...)

Opposite the doorway was the south-facing window, wide open onto the courtyard of the building, and before it stood a little table bearing an instrument which, at first glance, came as quite a surprise: a large telescope (...) A fine Louis XVI cylinder desk with a broad upper flap held an electric motor, glass-legged stools, Leyden jars, ball exciters: in a word, all the instruments of electrical science of the period. If one adds to that magnifying glasses, microscopes, and jars containing animals and chemicals, it is clear that this side of the lawyer's office was the domain of a man with a love of science and curious about all modern discoveries (...) Must one then look any further for the causes of the scientific turn of mind which dominates Jules Verne's oeuvre?”



The *Saint-Michel III* at Quai de la Fosse, Nantes, its home port

5 I, rue Suffren

Jules Verne stayed here between June 1877 and September 1878, with his wife Honorine and son Michel, in the hope that here in Nantes - *“in the bosom of a family as united as it [was] numerous”* (letter to Hetzel) - the serious conflict between him and the teenager might die down. Here he met Aristide Briand, at the time a high-school student, who may have inspired the character of young Briant in *Two Years' Holiday*. During this sojourn in Nantes, Verne wrote *Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen*, a virulent denunciation of slavery and the slave trade, and came up with the idea for the philosophical *Tribulations of a Chinaman in China*.

◆ Making our way down to the Loire, we pass the Médiathèque Jacques Demy, at 15, Rue de l'Héronnière, and Michel Ardan - the hero of Verne's travels to the Moon - sculpted in bronze by Jacques Raoult in 1986.

“I have lived amid the maritime bustle of a large trading port, the starting point and destination of many voyages on the high seas”

6 Quai de la Fosse, place Cdt L'Herminier (arrêt chantiers navals)

“I can see it now, this Loire, a league of decks linking its many branches, its wharfs piled high with cargo, under the shade of great elms, at a time when the double railway line and tramlines had yet to be laid across it. Ships, two or three deep, line the wharfs, while others make their way up or down the river. There were no steamers back then, or at least very few, but the type of sailing ships that have been preserved and perfected so wonderfully by the Americans, with their clippers and three-masted schooners. At that time, we had only the heavy sailing vessels of the merchant navy. But they bring back such memories! In my imagination, I climbed their shrouds, hauled myself up their topmasts and clung to their masthead trucks!”

Never again would Jules Verne be able to “*see a vessel put out to sea, man-of-war or simple fishing-smack, but my whole being goes aboard*” (*The Green Ray*). This passion is present in many of his novels, including *The Sea Serpent: The Yarns of Jean-Marie Cabidoulin*, whose hero is the archetypal sailor of the whaling fleets of Nantes shipowners Dobrée and Thiébaud who perpetuated the legend of the great sea serpent, and whose other characters bear Nantes names.

The writer himself was the proud owner of three boats, all named *Saint-Michel*, after his son and several of his heroes, including Michel Ardan and Michel Strogoff. A replica of the *Saint-Michel II*, a fast and comfortable 13-metre pilot cutter, was built by the Nantes association for the preservation of maritime and river heritage, La Cale 2 l'Île, in hanger 31, Quai des Antilles. The *Saint-Michel III*, built in Nantes boatyard Babin et Jollet, was a 30-metre, two-masted yacht propelled by a 100-horsepower steam engine. Finished in mahogany and light oak, it offered the comforts of a lounge, dining room, office, kitchen, three cabins and twelve to fourteen berths. Nantes was its home port, and that of its crew, under the command of Captain Ollive, whose house still stands in Rue Boju, Trentemoult. “*What journeys lie ahead, (...) so many impressions and ideas to gather.*” (letter to Hetzel, Rue Suffren, Nantes, 1877)

View of 19th-century Nantes



7 Quai de la Fosse (arrêt Gare maritime)

In the mid-19th century, the Loire was Nantes' main transport route. Jules Verne owes it his first thrill when, at the age of 12, he sailed down to Saint Nazaire and saw the sea for the first time. That memory would be brought to life in *La Jangada*, *The Secret of Wilhelm Storitz*, *The Danube Pilot* and, above all, *The Mighty Orinoco*.

Illustration by George Roux for *The Mighty Orinoco*



'As natives of Nantes, Jean de Kermor and Sergeant Martial had to be struck by the Orinoco's appearance, now much wider. And so the old NCO could not help making this comment:

"Take a look, nephew - see where we've ended up!"

The young man left the deckhouse and stood in the bow of the vessel, its billowing sail now behind him. Under clear skies the distant grasslands were visible on the horizon. Then Sergeant Martial added,

"Could we have gotten turned around and returned to Brittany?"

"I see what you mean,» Jean answered. "Along this stretch, the Orinoco looks just like the Loire."

"Exactly, Jean, our very own Loire both above and below Nantes! Look at those yellow sandbars! Put half a dozen barges with big square sails in line over there, and you'd think we were heading in to Saint-Florent or Mauves!"

"You're right, my dear Martial, it's amazingly similar. What's more, those wide plains extending beyond the two banks of the river remind me of the prairies along the lower Loire near Pellerin or Paimboeuf."

"You've got me believing it, nephew! Any minute now I expect to see the steam launch from Saint-Nazaire - the 'pyroscaphe' she's called, one of those Greek names that I can never understand!"

8 Musée Jules Verne (3, rue de l'Hermitage)



The Jules Verne Museum

◆ Halfway down the Rue de l'Hermitage, the Esplanade Jean Bruneau has, since 2005, been the setting for a pair of bronze statues commissioned by the City of Nantes from Elisabeth Cibot: Jules Verne as a child sits facing the Loire, watching his future character Captain Nemo take a bearing with his sextant.

Built on a spot where the writer *"must have come often to contemplate the river, at the point where it becomes the gateway to the open sea and the path to adventure"* (Julien Gracq, *La Forme d'une ville*), the Jules Verne Museum offers to take visitors on a "journey through the writings of Jules Verne". It displays original books and documents, illustrations, posters, games and objects, films and manuscripts. In particular, the City of Nantes has put together a unique collection of autograph letters and manuscripts of some one hundred works, so that visitors are able to follow, line by line, the invention of the "science fiction" novel.



The young Jules,
sculpture
by Elisabeth Cibot
(2005)

“I was not ten years old when my father bought a property on the outskirts of the city, in Chantenay - what a pretty name!”

9 Chantenay

(29-29bis, rue des Réformes / 16, rue Eugène Leroux)

The Verne's country house is still standing, opposite the Church of Saint Martin, in Chantenay.

“A large, brown double gate gave access via a sandy drive to a one-storey house, with two walls extending back to the entrance. Along the front were banks of flowers and shrubs - spindles, laurels, hydrangeas - and two lime trees to the right of the front door, a fig tree to the left, stretched out their branches and their mass of foliage above the wall, so that the house was barely visible from the outside. (...)

The two main steps leading from the garden up to the front door were adorned with a wisteria, whose violet flowers and foliage wound gracefully around the railings. Begonias and wisteria lined the façade (...)

The two adjoining gardens formed a terrace. It was not long before Pierre Verne transformed the first - planted as an old-fashioned formal garden - into a landscaped garden (...) The only part to be kept was an avenue of clipped lime trees along the terraced wall overlooking the second garden. This was a covered walk with a good aspect, from where one could see the Loire and its meadows, ending in a shady glade and an arbour which opened onto the path.”

There, the young Jules daydreamed as he watched “*the ships heaving at anchor, unfurling their jibs and pulling on their spankers, turning into then out of the wind*”. He had his first taste of sailing with his brother, in hired boats “*at one franc for the day*”, and roamed from island to island up and down the Loire. Dreams and adventures fuelled by his keen reading of the seafaring novels of Fenimore Cooper and the adventures of “*Swiss Family Robinson, in preference to Robinson Crusoe*”. It was here he came up with the ideas for *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*: “*I am preparing for my underwater voyage, and my brother and I are getting together all the equipment needed for the expedition...*” (letter to his publisher, Hetzel, 1866).



The house in Chantenay, drawn by Raymond du Crest de Villeneuve, Jules Verne's nephew

FOR A MORE IN-DEPTH TOUR

To the east of the city centre, in the **Jardin des Plantes**, at the end of the Allée de la Musique, a monument by sculptor Georges Barreau, erected in 1910 by subscription, pays tribute to Jules Verne's works.

To the southeast, if you cross the Loire by ferry at Indre or Couëron, just like in Jules Verne's time, you can still see **La Guerche en Brains**, the house of his uncle Prudent Allotte de la Fuÿe.

*“We were at an old uncle of mine's, a former shipbuilder. He had been to Caracas and Porto Gabello! We called him Uncle Prudent, and I named one of the characters in **Robur the Conqueror** after him. But Caracas was in the Americas, a place which fascinated me even back then. And, as we couldn't sail on the sea, my brother and I sailed across woods and meadows, in the heart of the countryside. With no masts to climb, we spent our days up in the trees! It was a competition to see who could build the highest crow's nest. We chatted, read, made travel plans, while the branches, blowing in the breeze, created the illusion of a ship pitching and rolling! A delightful way to while away the hours!”*

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Musée Jules Verne (Jules Verne Museum)

02 40 69 72 52

3, Rue de l'Hermitage - 44100 Nantes

For opening hours and events programme

Please visit our website:

www.julesverne.nantesmetropole.fr

Centre d'Études Verniennes (Centre of Jules Verne Studies)

02 40 41 42 33

Médiathèque Jacques Demy

24, Quai de la Fosse

Documentation and archives on Jules Verne

Consultation by appointment

www.julesverne.nantesmetropole.fr

Nantes Tourisme (Nantes Tourist Office)

0892 464 044

9, rue des États (opposite the castle)

Monday to Saturday - 10am to 6pm

Sunday and national holidays - 10am to 5pm

July and August - every day from 9am to 7pm

Guided tours on Nantes and Jules Verne

www.nantes-tourisme.com

Mairie de Nantes (Nantes City Hall)

Information Line: 02 40 41 90 00

Direction du Patrimoine et de l'Archéologie

(Heritage and Archeology Department)

Direction Générale à la Culture (Culture Office)

2, Rue de l'Hotel de Ville - 44094 Nantes cedex 1

www.nantes.fr

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