

Tourist guide

SAINT-CHAMAS



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From the Vth to the XVIth century, Sancto-Chamatio, Sanct-Chamas and finally Saint-Chamas, existed behind its tall town walls, set up high on “Le Baou” around its church and its holy protector; Amantius. Twelve centuries of war and peace, prosperity (*thanks to its port activities*) and misery.

During the XVIIth century, when a more lasting peace was established, a new housing policy was put into action. Beautiful dwellings were built at the Penitents, in “Le Pertuis” and in “Le Delà.”

What is now the museum was originally built to be the first Town Hall. Olive trees and vineyard were once again planted. The “overflow” of the water of the channel was sold to King Louis the XIVth. This was the starting point of “La Poudrerie,” (*gunpowder factory*) which became a source of income for several generations for the inhabitants of Saint-Chamas.

During the XVIIIth century, the old village was entirely destroyed. It was later used as a quarry for the building of the port, until then a simple creek, and some new houses. Two new quarters arose: one next to the port, another next to the town hall, linked by a dark, moist, cold tunnel called “La Goule.”

In December 1863, “La Goule” collapsed. The town council had “Le Baou” cut off and a new aqueduct was built, “Aqueduc du Plan.” From that time onwards, Saint-Chamas adopted its current outlook. New avenues were opened or enlarged: “Boulevard Pasteur,” “Rue Gambetta,” “Rue Voltaire.”

Today, Saint-Chamas is a big village-town making efforts to modernise (*yachting harbour, new town quarters*). But it is proud of its relics, especially its very famous “Pont Flavien,” and has managed to maintain all the characteristics of a traditional Provençal village.

Sites and Monuments

THE PONT FLAVIEN: Built by the Romans during the 1st century B.C, under the reign of Emperor Augustus. It was saved from decay at the beginning of the XVIIth century and has since been restored

many times, but still possesses the class of a rare monument. The numerous prints and traces of the

harnesses of the passing horses are still testimony to its frequent use.

THE PARISH CHURCH: Built from 1660 to 1668 by Pierre Pavillon, an architect from Aix en Provence. The church tower was built on piles and was finished in 1740. The front is a jewel of Provencal Barock style, contrasting with its very sober-almost naked-interior. The second

chapel, at the right side of the entrance, is decorated with a wonderful altar piece in low relief, retracing

the life of the holy virgin and the saint Anna altar piece (*XVth century*)

CAVE DWELLINGS: Two types of caves: natural ones, in a larger number, and caves that were built starting in 1615, following the transfer of lord of Saint-Aman's property rights to the town council. It is he who gave the permission to dig "baume." (*cave dwellings in the Baou*) He limited the

area, but his recommendations were not followed. The excess caused crumbling. The caves were used

to stock merchandise from the ports, the mills, or as shelter places.

During the XVIIIth century, the caves started to be used as dwellings.

LA POUDRERIE: By an act dated the 20th of March 1690 the overflow of the water of the channel was sold to the king "in order to be used for the powder hammer that his Majesty had constructed for the

hamlet of Saint-Chamas." Starting with several hectares, it covers now more than 100 hectares after having gained soil from the lake's swamps through dikes and embankments. Some of the trees are

more than one hundred years old. La Poudrerie, which sustained several generations of Saint-Chamas inhabitants, has now ceased its activity.

THE "AQUEDUC DU PLAN" OR "PONT DE L'HORLOGE": On December 18, 1863, the tunnel « La Goule » collapsed. Saint-Chamas was cut into parts and deprived of water. After a long and expensive clearing, an aqueduct of 62 m long and 23 m high was built. The clock dates from 1902.

The inlet and the outlet of the water are remarkable.

THE FORT'S GATE: Last remnant of the city wall of the ancient Saint-Chamas, dating from the XVth century.

THE WASHING PLACE OF THE POLYGONE: Washing place from the XVIIth century reserved for contaminated plague victims.

TOWN MUSEUM: The first Town Hall of Saint-Chamas (*XVIIIth Century*) became a museum in 1959. It was restored and then inaugurated in 1983, but its character has been preserved and it is still the ideal environment for our very interesting local history museum. It mainly holds gifts from the inhabitants of Saint-Chamas. One can experience life and important events of our Village in the older times. Ancient engravings and photographs show us today an unrecognizable Saint-Chamas.

The archaeological room is on the first floor. Very beautiful commemorative plaques from the Chapelle de la Vierge and works of art by *Seyssaud*, *Berle* and *Monte* can be admired.
Open from Monday to Friday from 14h to 17h.

CHAPEL OF NOTRE DAME DE MISERICORDE: (patron saint of sailors)
Overhanging the lake and the village, famous for its commemorative plaques.
Some of its naive paintings have been restored and can nowadays be found in the museum.

SAINT LEGER VIADUC: An exceptional monument due to its length and curve. It was built between 1843 and 1847. The vaults are crossed to enable the crossing of the Touloubre River. It has 49 arches and is 25 meters high (*on the level of the Touloubre*).
The railway passes on top of it.

HERMITAGE OF SAINT-LEGER: Already existed in the XVIth century. The notables of the village chose it as their burial place. It was destroyed in 1845 because of the building of the viaduct and then later rebuilt at its current place. It was a center of pilgrimage and devotion for the inhabitants. The Chapel has been abandoned for the last quarter century.

THE BRIDGE OF LA ROQUETTE: Destroyed by flooding from the river La Touloubre, was rebuilt in 1750.

LOCAL PRODUCTS :

- Provençal cooking : Marius Bernard canning factory
- Wines : La Suriane
- Soap : Soap Factory « Le Mas du Roseau »

MARKET : Every Saturday morning

TOURIST OFFICE INFORMATION

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Open from Monday to Saturday from 9h to 12h and from 13h30 to 17h30

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Open on Sunday from 14h30 to 18h (July and August)