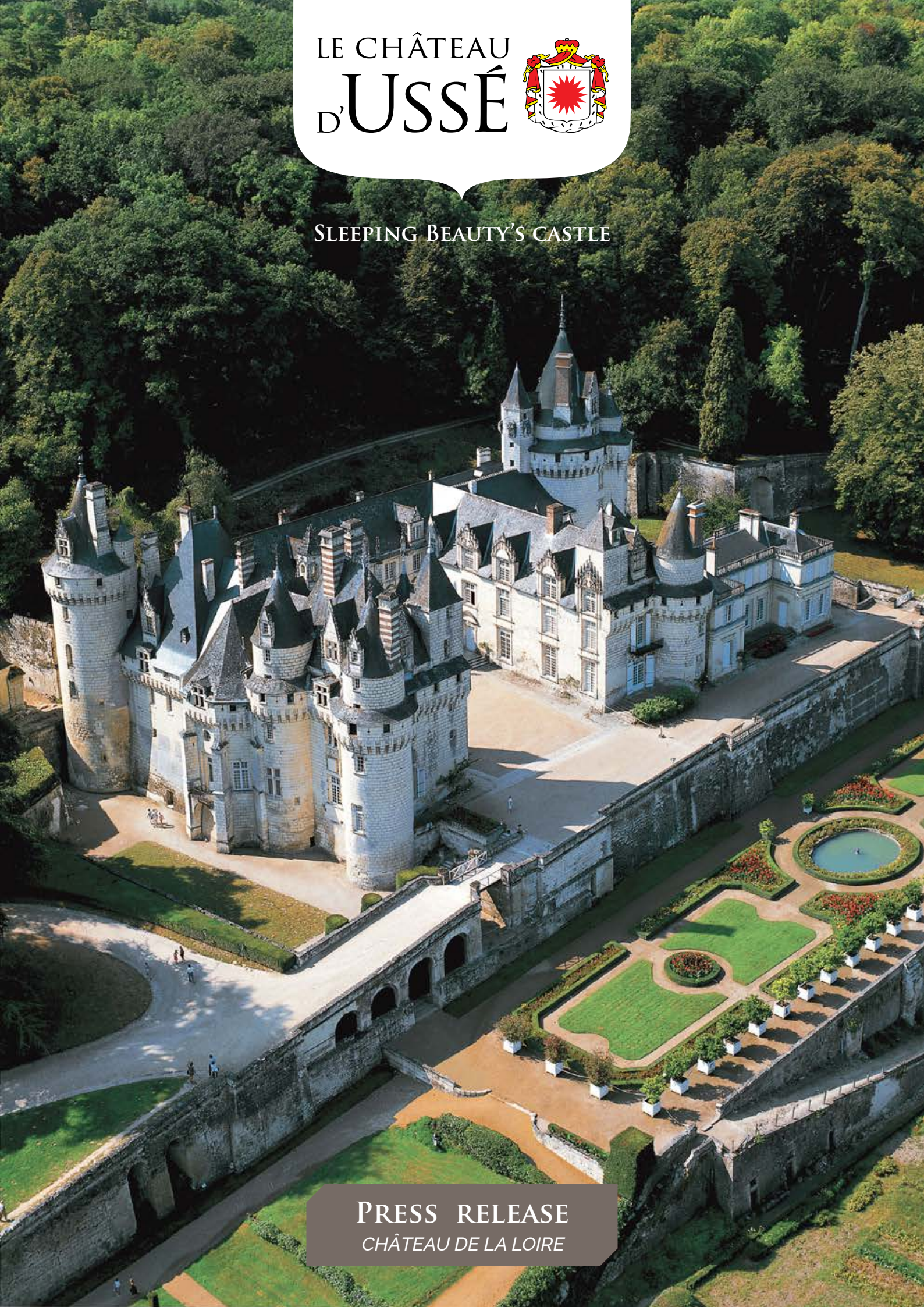


LE CHÂTEAU  
D'USSÉ



SLEEPING BEAUTY'S CASTLE



PRESS RELEASE  
CHÂTEAU DE LA LOIRE

## WELCOME

Ussé has ten centuries of history to offer its visitors and a unique legend: Ussé is the fairy tale castle that gave rise to the story of Sleeping Beauty. But Ussé is, above all, a château that is still a home, one which is very much alive today and never sleeps! Each year, throughout the season, there is a different exhibition of historical costumes to help shed light on the way people lived in the past.

Our family is proud to go on sharing the heritage that it has unstintingly and lovingly preserved for more than two centuries.

*Casimir, Duke of Blacas*

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Salle de gardes

## THE CHÂTEAU D'USSE A BRIEF SUMMARY:

The Château d'Ussé is the only privately owned château of the Loire valley to have been lived in by the same family for more than two centuries.

It is one of the châteaux of the Loire classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Backed by the forest of Chinon and on the banks of the Indre, it is situated on the old route linking Chinon (15km) to Tours (42 km). The châteaux of Azay-le-Rideau, Villandry and Langeais are its famous neighbours.

It opened to the public in 1975 and receives more than 100,000 visitors every year.

It is surrounded by a 600 hectare park and the roof of the château extends over an area of nearly 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

In 1927, Ussé appeared on the Historic Monuments' list and since 1931 and 1951 it has been classed as a Historic Monument. Constructed of local tufa stone its disparate architectural styles show how the building evolved from

fortress to splendid residential home during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its dungeons, orangery and gardens all demonstrate this evolution.

The château has kept a large part of its 18th century furniture and this has been added to and embellished by successive generations. Ussé possesses a beautiful collection of tapestries, oriental weapons and Chinese porcelain.

The French style garden, designed by Le Nôtre, is decorated with orange trees some of which are over a hundred years old. Vauban created terraces by using his knowledge of how to construct fortifications.

Ussé has received many famous intellectuals within its walls, such as Perrault, Voltaire and Chateaubriand. Notably, Perrault took Ussé as inspiration for his fairy tale Sleeping Beauty. Children can re-live the main scenes of this fairy tale in the dungeon's sentry walk.

Every year a new exhibition of costumes from a past century graces the main rooms of the château.





## A FEW KEY DATES:

### BEFORE 1,000 AD

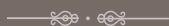
The strategic site of "UCEUM" controlled navigation on the Loire and the Indre as well as the route from Chinon to Tours.

The Viking Guelduin 1 built the first fortress.



### 1430 - 1450

Jean de Bueil, King Charles VII's captain built the basic structure of the present day château.



### 1485

Ussé passed to the Espinay family.



### 1538

Foundation of the Collegiate Chapel of Ussé. The chapel was dedicated to Saint Anne.



### 1659

The estate was enlarged and transformed into a residence by Bernin de Valentinay. The gardens were designed by Le Nôtre and the terraces were altered by Vauban.



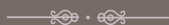
### 1700 - 1780

The estate was further enlarged and Ussé became a residential home with the addition of a courtyard overlooking the valley.



### 1807

The château was bought by the Duchess of Duras.



### 1885

The property became the possession of the Duke of Blacas d'Aulps.



### 1972

The Negus, Haile Selassie last Emperor of Ethiopia came to stay at Ussé.



### TODAY

The 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Blacas is the current owner of the château.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CHÂTEAU

The site was already mentioned in Roman times. Before 1,000 AD it was simply a stronghold built of stone and wood.

Around the year 1,000 AD Gelduin I, the fearsome Viking warrior known as "the Devil of Saumur" built the first fortress. Ussé became a seigneury.

The fortress was re-enforced by Jean V de Bueil, Charles VII's captain and supporter of Joan of Arc during the Hundred Years War. As time went by it lost its military role and became an elegant residence.

The Espinay family, who were the owners in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, carried out alterations in the Italian Renaissance style.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the château became the property of Louis Bernin de Valentinay, Marquis of Ussé and Louis XIV's Controller-General of Finances. He modernised and embellished the residence. His son married the Maréchal de Vauban's daughter who altered the terraces of the château and established gardens designed by Le Nôtre. It was when the Valentinay family were there that Perrault and Voltaire came to Ussé.

In 1807, the Duchess of Duras Douairière, her daughter in-law, the Duchess of Duras and her mother, the Countess of Kersaint, decided to buy the château. Today their descendants, the family Blacas d'Aulps, still live in the château and lovingly preside over it.



## THINGS TO SEE AT CHÂTEAU D'USSÉ

### INSIDE THE CASTLE:

Ussé is mostly furnished with quality 18<sup>th</sup> century French furniture with the addition of some imposing 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian pieces and decorations.

#### THE ENTRANCE HALL

Italian furniture, marble bust.



#### THE GUARD ROOM

A collection of ceremonial weapons in chiselled silver encrusted with precious stones. Oriental objects from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

A collection of miniatures painted on ivory brought back from India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and porcelain from China and Japan. The ceiling was painted as a "trompe l'œil" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and looks exactly like marble.



#### THE VAUBAN SALON

This was the former interior chapel of the château and it became the Maréchal de Vauban's bedroom in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It contains a 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian cabinet with forty nine secret drawers inlaid with precious stones, a "Mazarin Bureau" in lemon and rosewood and some 16<sup>th</sup> century Brussels tapestries.



#### THE CENTRAL GALLERY

This arcaded gallery has a collections of 17<sup>th</sup> century Flanders tapestries based on cartoons by Téniers with intimate details of everyday country life.

#### THE GRAND STAIRCASE

The grand straight staircase in the château, with its wrought iron banisters, was designed by Mansart. 18<sup>th</sup> century sedan chair and 19<sup>th</sup> century canon.



#### THE KING'S CHAMBER

It was restored with high class furnishings in 1995. 18<sup>th</sup> century silks with Chinese designs and furniture dating from 1770. A Polish style four poster bed from the reign of Louis XVI. A 17<sup>th</sup> century Venetian mirror. 17<sup>th</sup> century block work parquet floor.

#### THE DUNGEON

A construction typical of the Middle Ages. A spiral staircase leads to up to the wooden eaves from where there is a splendid view over the valley.



#### THE CELLARS

Cellars dug out from the local tufa in the 15th century. The stone was then used to build the château. A passageway links the various cellars in which there are vats, a wine press and traditional harvesting and wine making equipment. At the end is the little chapel dedicated to Saint Vincent, the patron saint of wine makers.

#### IN THE PARK:

##### THE CHAPEL

The chapel was built at some distance from the château in the 16th century and is surrounded by a cemetery. The entrance is decorated with a frontispiece in the form of a shell, typical of the Renaissance period. Inside there are stalls sculpted by Jean Goujon and an enamelled earthenware statue of the Virgin by Luca della Robbia.

##### THE STABLES

Carriages, light horse drawn vehicles or official vehicles, donkey drawn or dog drawn carts, give us a picture of what daily life was like for the château's inhabitants. In the tack room, harnesses and saddles, one of which is an Amazon's saddle.



##### THE GARDENS

Le Nôtre, the creator of the gardens at Versailles, designed the park and the gardens at Ussé, in the French style, in 1664. The alterations to the terraces were carried out by Vauban. Orange trees, some of which are two hundred years old, border the gardens. There are two Cedars of Lebanon near the chapel which were presented to the Duchess of Duras by Chateaubriand in 1808. The gardens were completed by the addition of a huge orangery built to overwinter the orange trees.

The Château d'Ussé takes part in the nationwide event "Rendez-vous aux Jardins" in June, as well as the European Heritage Days in September.





## ARCHITECTURE

One of the main attractions of Ussé is the way it illustrates all the major trends of French architecture from the 14th to the 19th century. One can see them all in a single place.

The large dungeons pre-date the 14th century. As for the dungeons on the façade of the château they are a wonderful example of the Gothic style such as can be found in the Château of Saumur and in 15th century illuminations.

The chapel is a jewel of the Renaissance period: originally a medieval structure it has been overlaid with Italian Renaissance features.

The "Cour d'Honneur" on the right wing of the château, gives us an insight into the tastes of the second Renaissance period. The back of the courtyard is designed in the classical style of the 17th century and the left wing is a mixture of primitive Gothic and the Neo-Gothic of the 19th century.

The Vauban pavilion, attached to the château, was added by Maréchal de Vauban's daughter when she married the Marquis d'Ussé.





## THE LEGEND OF SLEEPING BEAUTY

Charles Perrault (1628 - 1703), paid neighbourly visits to the Château d'Ussé. At the time the château was covered in ivy and appeared to loom magically out of the trees in the Forest of Chinon. No doubt this mysterious apparition must have stimulated the writer's imagination.

In specially decorated rooms all along the sentry walk you can see the main scenes from Sleeping Beauty enacted:

- The young princess's christening, surrounded by her godmothers and the evil Carabosse,
- The terrible moment when she pricks her finger on the spindle,
- The moment she is awoken by Prince Charming...

When children visit the château, they are invited to solve riddles as part of a treasure trail "From Tales to Fairy Tales".



## EXHIBITIONS OF ANCIENT COSTUMES

Every year, and for the last twenty years, Ussé has dressed in different clothes in order to bring the past to life.

This year's 2021 exhibition displays women's fashion during the inter-war period 1918-1942.

During the First World War women not only played the traditional role of wife and mother but they also had to stand in for their husbands who had gone to war. This shift in their status also meant a change in the clothes they wore, so female fashion became much simpler and far less fussy.

The Great Depression sounded the death knell of the Roaring Twenties and the thirties saw the return of a more classical style. Curves became fashionable once again and women's bodies were draped in swathes of material, a look inspired by classical statuary.

War, however, was once again on the horizon and as early as 1937 a more 'military' look was the norm. Shoulder pads made an appearance, as if to emphasise women's ability to shoulder all sorts of heavy responsibilities and skirt lengths had to be regulated as cloth was in short supply.

*The exhibition mounted by Thierry Grassat, photos @ Alexandra Caban*





## THE CHÂTEAU D'USSÉ IN FIGURES

- More than **400 000** slates for the château alone
- More than **100 000** visitors per year (25% are children over 8 years old)
- Around **10 000 M<sup>2</sup>** of roof including the château, the out buildings and the chapel
- **10 000** pansies are planted on the terraces each year
- Open to the public for **9600** days since 1975
- The property extends over almost **1000** hectares with about 600 hectares immediately surrounding the château
- Around **50** mannequins are used for the costume exhibition and the scenes from Sleeping Beauty
- **50** orange trees in pots to be brought in in autumn and taken out in spring
- The dungeon is **33** meters high and has more than **100** steps
- **30** metres of underground passageways
- Between **15** and **25** employees depending on the season
- The **7<sup>TH</sup>** Duc de Blacas - The current owner of the château

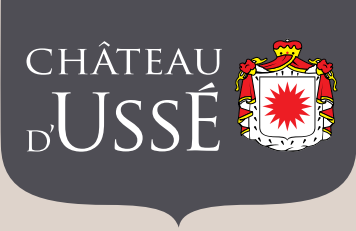
## OTHER EVENTS

On Easter Sunday, the bells traditionally conceal coloured eggs in the gardens of the château!

The Château d'Ussé takes part in the nationwide event "Rendez-vous aux Jardins" during the first weekend of June.

Ussé also takes part in the European Heritage Days during the third weekend of September.





## PRATICAL INFORMATION:

Château d'Ussé  
37420 Rigny-Ussé  
Tel : +33 2 47 95 54 05  
Fax : +33 2 47 95 43 58  
e-mail : chateauusse@gmail.com  
www.chateaudusse.fr  
www.facebook.com/chateaudusse

### Opening Hours 2021

The Castle was closed until the 21<sup>st</sup> of May due to the Pandemic Covid-19.

### Visits

The château and gardens are open to visitors but there are no guided tours. Information sheets are given to visitors in French, English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Japanese, Mandarin and Cantonese.

School groups may visit if reservation is made in advance : Tel : +33 2 47 95 54 05 or on line on the Château d'Ussé's web site.

## ACCESS

The Château d'Ussé is 2 km from the Loire on the banks of the Indre, in the village of Rigny-Ussé.

### By car

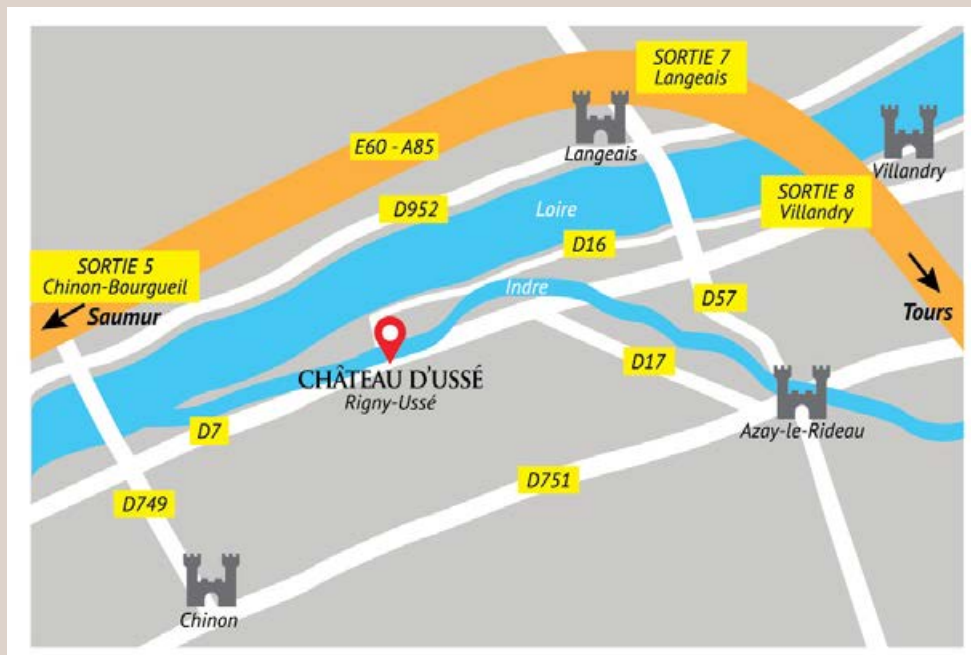
15 km from Azay-le-Rideau, Langeais, Chinon; 40 min from Saumur; 45 min west of Tours; 2h30 from Paris by motorway A10; 1h 45 from Orléans by motorway A10.

### By train

1 hour by train from Paris Gare Montparnasse to Tours.

### By bike

Ussé is a pleasant stop en route for those cycling along the banks of the Loire. It is part of the circuit the Loire by Bike. There is a ferry across the river to Chapelle-sur-Loire.



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