Besançon: A Time Teller and a Storyteller

Besançon is the City of Time, a bona fide teller of time and she has a thousand stories to tell. Time, as told by all the clocks and watches that have been made since the 18th century, has forged Besançon’s reputation.

And time: what you are invited to take to discover and explore Besançon. And so, we must take a journey: a journey through time, but also through space and landscapes.

Besançon’s story began in the loop in the Doubs River, where greens of every hue abound. Vauban’s presence, of course, is at every street corner; the lines of 16th- and 17th-century mansions proudly display their angular beige-blue stone facades, and there are her courtyards and secret staircases. Her festivals and events throughout the year lend vibrancy to the air. There is her fabulous history of watchmaking and micro- and nanotechnologies that connects the halls of time and science. And then, there are the best places to go, the leading figures of yesterday and today...

Besançon invites you to explore her great classics, her bold innovations and recent discoveries.

This is a journey, and all journeys have stages. Here in this book and just for you, Besançon will tell you her story in stages.

She will make some thematic stops, some stops for stories and snapshots; she will take you down the paths of the periods and trends that have marked her past, have organized her present, and which point to her bright future.

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Green, Green, Green

On The Beautiful Loop

Experience Besançon!

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Because of its geographical location, Vesontio (as Besançon was called then) became a city of considerable importance as early as ancient Roman times. The remains of the Triumphal Arch at the Black Gate and the Corinthian columns in Castan Square bear witness to this. Besançon gradually assumed the position of capital of Franche-Comté, and it became a prefecture in 1569.

Louis XIV owed much to Sébastien Le Prestre Vauban. It was he who provided the brilliant strategic and military advice that was largely responsible for the destruction of the Besançon (and Franche-Comté) forces. And this astonishing theorist of fortifications was also one of the fathers of the reconstruction of Franche-Comté. Under his leadership, strong defensive bastions were built, which for over four centuries have reflected the intrinsic identity of the city.

Just as the Loop of the Doubs has done, so the Citadel has given Besançon its distinctively unique character. Water below and stone above, are the two visual markers, both geographical and historical, that define the contours of the old town. They are the signatures of the city.

Let’s go to the old town now. Here, the streets and squares are lined with the 16th- and 17th-century proud mansions of blue-beige stone. And here, in the St. Jacques Hospital complex, you can see the dome of the Refuge Chapel, the apothecary and the finely-worked black and gold gates. Just a few steps away, Revolution Square shows more of the elegant harmony of that delicately tinted blue-beige stone from the quarries in Chailluz Forest. And now, we are at the fortified embankments along the Doubs. Battant Bridge connects us to Battant, a picturesque quarter that is a maze of narrow streets whose half-timbered houses go right up to Fort Griffon.

ROMAN, REVOLT, RESISTANCE

Invincible, proud, rebellious: Besançon had everything it needed to resist the King of France and remain the old Spanish town that it had been since 1519. Charles V and the Hapsburgs, Enraged by the Doubs River, which to the northeast enclosed it in a perfect omega shape, and a craggy and rocky hill at its back forming a natural fortress and a defensive line to the southeast, Besançon exemplified the character of the whole Franche-Comté Province impregnable. It was not yet the capital of the province; the administration, judicial, political and even academic honours belonged to Dole.

The 18th century had only just begun when Louis XIII finally decided to annex this indomitable and strategically-located province to his kingdom. Richelieu began his attacks in 1669. And after ten years of war and devastation, the Franche-Comté people still resisted.

Louis XIV carried on the war campaigns of his father, launching a second offensive in 1668, then a third in 1674. Besançon surrendered for the first time in 1669, was given back to Spain by a territorial exchange between the kingdoms, and was finally defeated by Louis XIV in May 1674.

At the Treaty of Nijmegen, 17 September 1678, Spain finally ceded Franche-Comté to Louis XIV and thus nearly 160 years of Spanish domination ended. Unfortunately, there are no architectural remains from that time in Besançon.

The Sun King showed his love for this beautiful province, embellishing it even more.

BEAUROCRAZY

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MARKERS OF HISTORY: HERITAGE IN ALL ITS DIFFERENT SHAPES AND FORMS

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It's good to yield to curiosity where Besançon's court-yards are concerned. You'll find hidden treasures: spiral stairs, straight and double flights, intricacies of stone, wood and iron. Because of the confining Loop of the Doubs, building space in the old town was limited. The mansions and rentals were built deep in the courtyards, in several separate buildings. To gain space, the stairs were built outside, affixed to the party walls. All the courtyards of the old town charm the eye upward in a dizzying way: up to the upper floors. Ornate wrought iron railings decorate the lower floors, where the noble owners lived; the upper floors were for rentals and merited only balusters of wood: but lovely just the same! And besides the stairs, these courtyards hold turrets, stained glass and totally unexpected gardens. Dare to push open the gate and go in…
Imagine a loop, a perfect omega-shape drawn by a river. And then, closing the open portion of the loop, imagine a hill, steep and rocky enough to make climbing it difficult, but of a height and accessibility that make it possible to develop. This is the natural configuration of Besançon: one which Vauban knew how to exploit so he could build his fortifications while at the same time strengthening the identity of the town. The impregnable town…

The Citadel (along with the city walls and Fort Griffon) was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site List on 7 July 2008. It is one of Vauban’s finest fortified citadels. It has a total of 10 kilometres of walls with half-bastions, turrets, sentry boxes, curtain walls, towers and other defensive works.

The architectures of the Citadel and its natural layout and landscape make it one of Vauban’s masterpieces. This fortress covers 15 hectares and is perched 16 metres high on an anticlinal hill that looks down upon the city. Vauban, who was both a military strategist and an architect, did not stop with the Citadel, but provided the whole city with a defensive structure.

Because the town was encircled by the Loop of the Doubs, Vauban built city walls to protect the left bank of the river, reinforcing it with six bastions. He also planned the construction of a prestigious embankment, the Quai Vauban, and a second citadel on Battant Hill, Fort Griffon.

In all, and including the Citadel, there are 18 key fortification sites in existence, and they reinforce the stunning architectural identity of the city. From the Stone-cut Gate on the left bank, upstream of the Loop, to the Notre Dame Tower on the same bank at the other end of the river’s curve, and passing through Battant Gate and its fortifications on the other bank, rising above the city it all makes for a wonderful walk through Besançon and its history.
Sébastien Le Prestre Vauban was born in May 1633 in Saint-Léger-de-Foucheret (Yonne), in Burgundy, into a family of minor nobility. At 17 he became a cadet in the Prince of Condé’s regiment; the prince led the Fronde against Cardinal Mazarin and the regent, Anne of Austria. In 1653, Vauban was taken prisoner and entered the service of Louis XIV, whom he served for 53 years. When he was 22, Vauban became a commissioned engineer to the king. Vauban had experienced war first-hand and he carefully studied the process of attacking fortresses. He developed and codified a siege method, breaking it down into a logical sequence of 12 phases. This work was published 30 years after his death in his Treatise on the Attack of Fortresses. He focused his engineering skills on improving fortifications by emphasising a bastioned line to fit the terrain and the phasing of deep defence.

Vauban knew very well that no stronghold is truly impregnable: its main role was to serve as a deterrent and sieges were to be avoided as much as possible. On 14 January 1703, Louis XIV appointed him Marshal of France for his service to the kingdom. Vauban died on 30 March 1707 in Paris, at the age of 74.

From 1653 to 1703, Vauban was involved in 48 sieges, reworked 130 fortresses and built 30 from the ground up. He left behind him around 30 plans, which were put into practice after his death.

Source: www.sites-vauban.org/
MUSEUM BYWAYS

Besançon is the political and economic capital of Franche-Comté, and it is also a cultural capital. Besides the museums at the Citadel and the bucolic Museum of Franche-Comté Houses in Nancray, there are two Besançon museums that are among the finest in France. The Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology is one, and the Museum of Time, which is housed in the sumptuous setting of Granvelle Palace, is the other. Let’s go on a guided tour…

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS: A PRECURSOR

How we are at Revolution Square: it’s been recently renovated. We’re standing in a vast, bright plaza surrounded by elegant facades in the blue-beige stone stone so characteristic of Besançon. Across from the fountain, you can see a long, imposing building of unique architecture: this is the Museum of Fine Arts and Archaeology.

In its first collection is a story in itself. Towards the end of the 17th century, Jean-Baptiste Boisot, abbot of Saint Vincent’s Monastery, purchased the art collections and library assembled in the 16th century by the Lord Chancellor of Charles V, Nicolas de Granvelle, and his son Antoine. In 1694, Boisot left his collections to the Benedictines of St. Vincent’s, on the condition that they be made available to the public. A century before the creation of museums in France, Besançon had the first public art collection!

That first collection was enriched through a number of donations and legacies and in 1843 it was moved into the old Corn Exchange Building. In the 1960s, Louis Miquel, a disciple of Le Corbusier, renovated the museum: he installed a concrete spiral walkway. The building is a timeless structure of raw concrete carcass and natural colour, and within it, you follow a chronological path from prehistory to the present.

Bellini, Goya, Fragonard, Courbet, Bronzino, representing the major European movements from the 14th to the 20th century, are part of the permanent collection of the museum. There are other treasures, too: sculptures by Clésinger, Rodin and Morelet, and a collection of 5,500 drawings by artists such as Carracci, Jordaens, and Géricault. And there are always fascinating temporary exhibits.

The Museum will be renovated soon.

www.musee-arts-besancon.org/

THE OUTSIDE-OF-TIME MUSEUMS OF THE CITADEL

The Citadel is a vibrant place, full of culture, exchanges, events and learnings. Once you pass within its walls, time falls away and your museum explorations and your explorations become all the more vivid and memorable.

• The Museum is comprised of the zoo that is home to many endangered species, the aquarium, the insectarium and noctarium.
• The Franche-Comté Museum presents its extensive collection through the eyes of an ethnographer.
• The Resistance and Deportation Museum is a place of remembrance and vivid memories of a tragic time that is in our not-so-distant past. Painful episodes of the war, the Vichy regime, deportations... and then liberation: this exhibit is both educational and very moving.
• The Vauban Area, not exactly a museum since it only displays reproductions of famous paintings, paints the picture of Vauban and his works as Resources

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**THE MUSEUM OF TIME: UNPRECEDENTED**

A Renaissance palace, both exquisite and sumptuous: such is the setting of this extraordinary museum. The museum is unique in that it brings together a fine arts collection, and a scientific collection focused on the measurement of time. In the fine arts, you will find the beautiful furniture, paintings and tapestries that depict the prestigious destiny of Nicolas and Antoine de Granvelle, staunch servants of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and leading politicians on the 16th-century European stage. And as for time and its measurement, all the expertise of Franche-Comté watchmakers is on display here. Among its treasures, the Museums of Time has unique collections valuable 16th-century table clocks, 16th-century pocket watches, the first pendulum watch of great technological and aesthetic refinement, the French Le Roy and its 24 complications (the watch which was for nearly a century the most complicated in the world). In all, there is a total of 200 rare pieces on display for you to explore time and the watchmaking history of Besançon.

**A DAY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AT THE OPEN-AIR MUSEUM OF FRANCHE-CÔTÉ HOUSES**

Just minutes from the town centre, come visit a place where you can see Franche-Comté heritage: homes and old rural traditions. From the farmhouses in the Saône Plain at the foothills of the Vosge Mountains to farmhouses in the Jura Mountains, from the half-timbered houses of the Jura’s Bresse to those of Sundgau, not to mention the smokehouses of Haut-Doubs, your walk is a rich educational experience and a refreshing change of scenery. The Museum is teeming with events, workshops and exhibitions for the whole family. What better way to spend a day than in the wide-open Franche-Comté countryside, just a hop, skip and a jump from the city centre!

**VICTOR HUGO’S HOUSE**

The birthplace of Victor Hugo opened its doors in September 2013. It was here that this great man was born on 26 February 1802, and it is here that his commitments and major battles are celebrated. The home of Victor Hugo is designed to be a living space, with educational and appealing exhibits that are accessible to all. It is a place which encourages reflection, by celebrating all the themes dear to the poet and which are still at the heart of today’s major social, ideological and political issues. The themes of freedom of expression, poetry, equality and justice, children’s education, and freedom of the people of the Republic, all these are presented on the first floor. The second floor highlights Hugo’s and his hometown, and the restored “salle” or basement has been transformed into a versatile room for special events.

**THE CENTRE OF THE ARTS**

The Centre of the Arts, open to the public, is located on the left bank of the Doubs at the old river port of Besançon. This imposing natural Leaving the Vers des Champs at the intersection with Kerigo Street and the eye of the place where nature and the city meet, where inhabitants and new visitors meet and where people meet with culture in its multiple forms.

The Conservatory houses about 80 classrooms and a 290-seat auditorium built with perfectly-adapted acoustics and set design facilities. The FRAC has more than 1,600 square metres for its two exhibition halls (300 and 100 square metres), a conference hall and several storerooms for its collections.

The Conservatory and the FRAC work together on the ground floor, which is open to the public. From the Arts Passage, you have access to two reception areas, a 290-metre-square resource centre containing the combined collections of the CRR and the FRAC, a café-brasserie and a bookshop.

**THE MUSEUM OF FRANCHE-CÔTÉ HOUSES**

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BESANÇON ON STAGE: FROM FESTIVALS TO PLAYS AND SHOWS

Besançon delights and thrills in celebrating art in all its forms. Classical music, theatre, dance, street performances, jazz, world music, discoveries, young talent and established artists. Besançon offers a cornucopia of events and moments to share, to remember, to thrill to. There are events for everyone all year round: Besançon is, indeed, the capital of Franche-Comté culture!

THE MUSIC THEATRE

The mission of this 1,380-seat municipal theatre, once a 19th-century old and located in the heart of the old town, is to provide ‘Bisontins’ with a season of eclectic, quality shows. The building was designed by Claude Nicolas Ledoux, architect of the famous Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans, and finished in 1796. Ledoux had his audiences’ acoustic and visual experiences in mind as well as their physical comfort and his theatre design was unprecedented for his time. Innovative design and a refined decor made the Music Theatre a centre for cultural exchange. In 1954 it was completely destroyed by fire, and was soon rebuilt in the same spirit; it was renovated in 1995. Comfort for its performers and audiences alike is still its hallmark and its reputation continues to grow throughout the region.

www.letheatre-besancon.fr/

LA RODIA

The latest arrival on the cultural scene in Besançon! La Rodia, technically state-of-the-art and architecturally audacious, opened in January 2011, and it’s the place for artists of modern music of all kinds, providing stage, residency, creation, and rehearsal facilities. The building is on the right bank of the Doubs, across from the Citadel, it has filled a huge cultural void and has at the same time injected new life into the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is centuries old and was an area for industrial development for some time. Today, it is shaking up the status quo, moving smoothly from the industrial to the cultural. Created on the drawing board of architects Denu and Paradon, La Rodia stands on stilts; it has a closed-in, 600 m² esplanade which is sound-proofed and equipped with giant screens, two concert halls (standing capacity of 900 and 320), a lobby bar, an information-exhibition area, 2 work studios, 3 dressing rooms, a call bar and an administrative centre.

www.larodia.com/
The Besançon-Montbéliard Franche-Comté Orchestra was created in 1994 by the City of Besançon, and was directed by Peter Csaba until September 2010. Then, Jean-François Verdier became director, and the Besançon-Montbéliard Franche-Comté Orchestra was created.

The orchestra offers the region a rich and varied lyrical and symphonic season and invites many renowned soloists and artists. Under its new name and its broadened dual-city base, the orchestra has established itself as a key player in the cultural landscape of Besançon and Franche-Comté. It continues to attract new audiences and is venturing out beyond regional boundaries...

The Besançon-Montbéliard Franche-Comté Orchestra is supported by the Ministry of Culture (Franche-Comté DRAC), the Doubs General Council and the Regional Council of Franche-Comté.

The INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL OF BESANÇON-FRANCHE-COMTÉ

This must-see-and-hear event in the symphonic and lyrical world takes place every autumn in Besançon. The list of performers continues to meet the expectations of audiences whose support is becoming stronger and stronger with every passing year. Since 1948, prestigious orchestras, renowned soloists and famous conductors have performed on the Besançon stage. The Festival took on even more significance in 1951, when the International Competition for Young Conductors was created. This exceptional event brings together competitors from around the world, and for the winners, access to the world’s greatest stages is guaranteed. Since the beginnings of the Festival, there has also always been room for creation and contemporary music. For two weeks a year, Besançon, with this exceptional programme, occupies centre stage of the international music world.

www.festival-besancon.com/
They say the Franche-Comté lot are rebellious, anti-establishment, daring, utopians, creative… And it also has to be said that ‘Bisontins’ do their region proud. From one century to another, from science to the stage, from literature to politics, from architecture to stadiums, Bisontins of birth and adoption have left their mark on history. Our hall of fame contains famous and perhaps not-as-famous people, all of strong character.

Charles FOURIER (1772-1837)
After working in trade and banking, Charles Fourier, philosopher and utopian economist, designed plans for a harmoniously built city, a Phalanstère (Phalanstery), whose citizens would find personal and professional fulfillment in their work. This economic, social and human reform project aimed at creating an ideal life for mankind, but attempts to bring this to fruition failed. Fourier was born in a 16th-century house, No. 61 and 63 Grande Rue. It was partially destroyed during the construction of what is today rue Lemonier.

Jean-Charles-Emmanuel NODIER (1780-1844)
Charles Nodier, journalist, writer and leader of the Romantics, moved to Paris in 1815, and in 1833, he was elected to the Académie Française. He frequently mentioned the charms of his native province in his writings. He was born 29 April 1780, most likely in a house - no longer extant - on Victor Hugo Square (site of the current No. 7), and spent his childhood in the house of his grandfather, the contractor Joseph Nodier, rue Neuve (now No. 11, rue Charles Nodier). He and Victor Hugo met on several occasions at reviews and critiques and while travelling, the two Bisontins developed a sincere and loyal friendship.

Victor HUGO (1802-1885)
Due to one of the military postings of his father, then General of the Empire, the Hugo family settled in the Doubs for a time. Victor was thus born in Besançon, the youngest of three children, at 14 Grande Rue. His godmother, with whom he remained in contact after the family left Besançon, lived at No. 14, rue des Granges.

This century was but two years old! Rome replaced Sparta,
Already Napoleon was emerging from within Bonaparte,
(...) In Besançon, that ancient town of Spain,
Tossed to the ever-flowing breeze like grain,
A child both Breton and Lorraine,
With neither hue nor sight nor sound,
This child whom life was wiping from its page
(Not one day would be added to his age)
Was myself.

Pierre-Joseph PROUDHON (1809-1865)
Born 15 January 1809 in Besançon at No.22, rue-du-Petit-Battant, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was a polemicist, journalist, economist and sociologist all at the same time. He became famous because of his quote “Owning property is thieving!” in his manifesto (his first major work). What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government, published in 1840.
Lyon in 1870.

(formerly the Dames de Battant Convent). The Lumière family moved to photographer and his studio was in the courtyard of No. 59, rue des Granges Saint Quentin Square (now Victor Hugo Square); their father, Antoine, was a made significant improvements to photography. They were born at No. 1, Léon Bouly in 1892), the two brothers were still the inventors of the techno-

Although they did not invent the word “cinematographer” (it was created by Léon Bouly in 1892), the two brothers were still the inventors of the techno-

The bust is an enlargement of a sculpture made by his daughter Anne. The was erected in memory of the Count of Chardonnet on Avenue d’Helvetie. 

Textile. The name was changed to Rhodia and it specialised in the manufacture into production on 1 June 1892. It was bought in 1954 by Rhone Poulenc 

Silkworks was set up in Prés-de-Vaux, along the Doubs, which provided 

The casamène estate, described in La Retraite Sentimentale, takes its inspiration directly from the house to which the novel was partly written. The house “with 

Sidone Gabrielle COLETTE (1873-1954)

“In sentimental Retirement, there are only two non-fiction portraits; one of my landscapes in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye, and one of the romantic little histories recent that we saw. The land that present the world-pictures at the pages of the book a text that is just glowing over the other side of the tag and I’m climbling the bell, claming the gate, turning a model on the author at 2 p.m. through, breathing in the sunshine until the shade of the trees at my side. I cross the threshold, I open my arms to the rooms that saw me young and happy, and fall into them.”

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Her speciality is the 100m hurdles event. Her speciality is the 100m hurdles event.

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THE CITY OF TIME: A HIGH-PRECISION STOP FOR MICRO- AND NANO-TECHNOLOGIES

Crowned capital of French watches at the 1860 World Fair, Besançon saw it all and experienced everything during the French and international watchmaking era: from phenomenal success to the virtual extinction of its major trade. But the expertise and passion for high precision have remained intact. Besançon is now shifting to micro- and nanotechnologies. As for the watchmakers, they never really all left Besançon. Some have even moved back.

Listen… the heart of Besançon is ticking once again…

FROM THE FIRST WATCH FACTORY...

It all began with the vision of a clock and watch dealer from Geneva, Laurent Mégevand. He began his career with watches as a master watch case builder. He married Marianne Breguet (of the Breguet family of clock/watchmakers, internationally renowned), daughter of the pastor from Le Locle, Switzerland; he settled there as a watch-dealer. In 1793, at age 39, he crossed the border into France with 80 Swiss watchmakers, all in their country’s disgrace because they supported the French Revolution. They went to Besançon, where Mégevand, with his knowledge and experience, ambition and innovative ideas, established a French clock/watchmaking factory. He was supported by his fellow pro-revolutionaries: Count Mirabeau, the Marquis Nicolas de Condorcet and Pierre-Joseph Briot (founder of the Jacobin Club in Besançon).

Manufacturing led to subcontracting, and at one point there were 700 Swiss watchmakers and 400 workshops in Besançon. Though Mégevand was financially ruined and quickly went bankrupt, the clock/watchmaking industry itself was solidly established in Besançon and the Doubs. Production increased by 70% in ten years and reached its peak in 1883 with a production of 500,000 parts. In 1880, the Besançon Chamber of Commerce announced that 90% of French clock/watchmaking took place in Besançon. The city hosted a world fair in 1869 and was crowned the capital of French watchmaking.

TO THE INDUSTRIAL AGE

Mechanisation began to develop as of 1889 with the creation of factories that produced mechanical driving parts. Abbot Faivre founded his school in the Petins Carmes Convent in the Battant Quarter in 1844. The Municipal School of Clock/Watchmaking was opened in Revolution Square in 1862; its students’ staff creations repeatedly won awards during the 1867, 1878 and 1893 world fairs. Besançon’s success and reputation were solidified further with the opening of a new facility on Avenue Victor Hugo, which included a school, the Chronome- ter Institute, and a jewellers section. The Besançon National School of Clock/Watchmaking was inaugurated on 2 July 1933 by President Lebrun.
THE LIP STORY

Three letters: a unique name and a symbol of social conflict, representative of the atmosphere of the 70s. The Lipmann Brothers Clock Factory had its beginnings in 1807 when Emmanuel Lipmann was made famous because of a pocket watch that he gave to Napoleon Bonaparte. In time, the company became known as LIP, making watchmaking history around the world. Electric watches, quartz watches, design watches: LIP was always on the cutting edge. Yet in 1973, a victim of competition from Asia, the company filed for bankruptcy. There followed nine months of social unrest and support from across France for the 180 employees in Besançon; they finally left the factory after a long, difficult conflict.

TIME IN FIGURES

For the national turnover in the clock/watchmaking sector, Franche-Comté’s accounts for 67 %, which in 2009 amounted to 157 million euros, according to the French Chamber of Clock/Watchmaking of Franche-Comté. With 89 clock/watchmaking establishments and a total of 2,120 employees (70 % of the national sector), Franche-Comté has a skilled and highly reputed workforce. Besançon has reclaimed its status as the capital of French clock/watchmaking.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW SECTORS OF EXCELLENCE

The infinitely small and high-precision technologies have revolutionized Besançon’s identity towards an expertise that, in the end, is very close to that of watchmaking. As a time when miniaturization is required in all industrial sectors, micro- and nanotechnologies are a perfect fit for Greater Besançon. Many high-performance companies and research centres have established themselves here. Some examples: A microtechnology cluster, the leading French centre for micro-and-nanotechnologies, a biomedical engineering centre, ticketing, electronic banking, automation, robotics firms...

More than ever, Besançon expertise is setting the standard. In the field of time-frequency analysis, NASA recognizes that the measuring devices designed by Besançon researchers are the world’s most reliable.

ENSMM

The National School of Mechanics and Microtechnology: this is where the creative minds of young engineers and researchers obsessed with high precision and the infinitely small brainstorm every day. Since 1902, Besançon has offered an exceptional scientific, technical and industrial environment that has forged the reputation of this school which today trains over 900 students. It is the only school in France that places such a strong emphasis on micro- and nanotechnologies.

THE ASTRONOMICAL CLOCK

This incredible clock, built by Augusto-Lucien Vérité in the late 19th century in Saint John’s Cathedral, is considered a masterpiece of the genre. It has 138 moving parts and shows 122 indications that are all interdependent: times, dates, months, holidays, the time of day at 20 locations around the world, number of lunar and solar eclipses, signs of the zodiac, date of Easter (by the number of days to be added to the lunar year to make it consistent with the solar year), dates and times of tides, solar time, solstices...

It took two years to build and three years of adjustments and improvements before it was “set into motion.”
Besançon, a destination for business tourism!

Besançon, repeatedly awarded for its quality of life, its parks and its rich heritage, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008! Besançon is an ideal city for business tourism. It is a university city, the City of Time, the world centre for time-frequency analysis and it is recognised as a centre of excellence for its innovations in the fields of nanotechnology, automation and robotics, biomedical engineering...

In addition to all these technological developments, Besançon has still more assets to attract a business clientele. It has an exceptional natural and historical heritage, a large choice of accommodation to meet the needs and requirements of clients, extensive and expanding meeting and reception facilities, as well as entertainment and cultural events that are as varied as they are renowned.

The Micropolis, just ten minutes from the town centre, offers both a convention centre and exhibition grounds. A surface area of more than 110,000 m² is available for businesses and professionals, perfect for large events of up to 2,200 people.

Committed to sustainable development, Besançon-Congrès (Besançon-Conventions) has signed a charter for Quality and Sustainable Development with France-Conventions.

The Visitor and Convention Information Centre, part of Besançon-Congrès, is at your service for making all your business events a success.

The Museum of Time

The Museum of Time, housed in a remarkable Renaissance palace, is unique. On display is an in-depth view of the clock/watchmaking expertise of Besançon and Franche-Comté. Clocks... from the astronomical ones to the frequency ones, from the quartz piezoelectric-effect ones to the atomic ones, from the incredibly large ones to the incredibly tiny ones of microtechnology: everything here is in immoderation.

SUNDIALS

"The sun lies, the clock tells the truth". There is a time-telling device on every street corner, or almost. There are dozens of sundials on the walls of the old town, and most of them add some philosophical reflection to time-telling by the quartz that displays.

The ‘Gnomon of Saint Madeleine’s Church

In the 18th century, Mr. Bizot made a sundial using a small hole in the centre of an opaque pane of stained glass at the back of the church. Sunlight passed through the hole connecting hour lines and hour numbers in Roman numerals engraved in a fan shape on the flagstones of the church.

The Observatory

At the request of Besançon watchmakers who wanted to match the accuracy of their Swiss competitors, the city built an astronomical, meteorological and chronometrical observatory; it was finished between 1883 and 1884. In addition to producing the exact time, the observatory provides watchmakers with an independent certification organisation, which offers a wide range of services that includes the inspection of watches.

The Awakening of the Viper

As of the 19th century, the viper’s head stamp awarded by the Observatory of Besançon was a world reference. In 1970, given the range of quartz, the certifying body in Besançon suspended its timepiece certification activities. From then on it was the COSC (Union Officielle Chronométrique) that set the standards and certified watchmakers’ mechanisms. As the only French body authorised to judge the stability of a watch over time, the Observatory has recently resumed this function. The prestigious L. Leroy Company has recently relocated to Besançon, and it leads the way, proudly displaying the viper’s head seal on their watches, attributing to the ultra-precision of Besançon. For here, at the Observatory, atomic time is measured by the tick-tick of a second.
They have called her proud, rebellious, resistant and resilient, as are her famous citizens; she is also bold and has always stood out from the rest. To experience Besançon for yourself, you may have to push open doors, take a good look around, sometimes climb tortuous stairs, dare to go back into those rear courtyards: be on the qui vive to discover their treasures. And what unique treasures!… Elements of architecture and decor, places and objects of daily life; they are an integral part of Besançon and reveal her identity in their own special way.

OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY!

EXCEPTIONAL NIGHTS
Spend a night of your dreams in an exceptional place. Besançon’s invisible invitation: Step out of time into a delightfully romantic 18th-century atmosphere at the foot of the Citadel and just across from the Astronomical Clock, or into the luminous, light decor of the contemporary guesthouse on rue Bersot, or be rocked gently by the Doubs River on a houseboat, or walk into this mansion, set between front and rear courtyards in the city centre (a historic property, beautifully renovated where Colette, George Sand and even Prosper Mérimée stayed). There is so much to choose from!

WALL OF IMAGES
Louis Pasteur, the Lumière brothers, Victor Hugo and even Gustave Courbet: you just need to glance up in Besançon to see famous people from Franche-Comté. Discover this series of trompe l’oeils as you walk around the city.

BESANÇON’S WATER
Would you like another glass of Sparkling Bisontine? Besançon bottles its own municipal water, and you will see its distinctive bottle on tables in bars and restaurants still or sparkling. To be consumed without moderation…

THE BELL-RINGER
The Jacquemart (an old-time automaton) at Saint Madeleine’s Church, in the Battant Quarter: the legendary bell-ringer for the Bousbots (as the inhabitants of Battant are called) makes a pipe and rings the hours.

In the olden days, his ringing alerted the neighbourhood to dangers.
STEAMBOATS.

The Marquis Jouffroy d’Abbans, a naval engineer, stands on the Yvel River Embankment, surveying the Doubs. He is life-size and cuts a very elegant figure, cast in bronze in 1998 by Pascal Coupot. The sculptor pays tribute to the inventor of the paddle-wheel steamboat. Far from the Mississippi where these famous boats sailed, it was on the Doubs in 1778 that Jouffroy d’Abbans carried out the first navigation tests with his boat, the Palmipède.

SECRET PASSAGES

The courtyards and inner courtyards of Besançon contain all kinds of treasures: let’s go to the courtyard of the Hôtel Champagney (a mansion belonging to the de Champagney family) on rue Battant. Here, there are half-timbered houses, with stairways and passageways that make (almost) secret passages. The tiny, narrow paragraphs and the steep streets and stairs are reminders of a city that lives with hills.

A CONTEMPORARY COURTHOUSE

The architect Henri Gaudin designed the new Courthouse, which opened in 2003. A vast interior esplanade is surrounded by a decidedly contemporary building that is connected to the Court of Appeals in the rear, which was designed by Hugues Sambin in 1585. It was originally the Besançon Parliament.

LINGUISTICS

The CLA, Centre for Applied Linguistics, is a modern Tower of Babel. And not just for its unique architecture: since 1958, the CLA has been recognised as the best centre for learning French as a foreign language. Four thousand students a year come to learn French and also English, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese, German...

The Jacquemart

The CLA

The Champagney Passage

The Marquis Jouffroy d’Abbans, a naval engineer, stands on the Veil Picard Embankment, surveying the Doubs. He is life-size and cuts a very elegant figure, cast in bronze in 1998 by Pascal Coupot. The sculptor pays tribute to the inventor of the paddle-wheel steamboat. Far from the Mississippi where these famous boats sailed, it was on the Doubs in 1778 that Jouffroy d’Abbans carried out the first navigation tests with his boat, the Palmipède.

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The Path of the Senses

Take a journey through the city centre from one artisanal workshop to another. Lute-makers, jewellers, bookbinders: discover the secrets of how they work… Please ask the Visitor and Convention Information Centre for information.

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Chamars Promenade: this space inherits its name from a contraction of the Champs de Mars (Field of Mars). First fortified by Vauban, it was at one time landscaped with waterfalls, an aviary, a café and public baths. From that flamboyant era we have today a public garden, two guardhouses, huge stone vases by sculptor Jean-Baptiste Boutry and hundred-year-old trees with lush foliage.

Casino gardens, Micaud Park and Helvétie Promenade: on the right bank of the Doubs, these public gardens, landscaped with lawns and flowering leafy lanes are very 1900’s in atmosphere. Micaud Park, 3 hectares, has over 400 trees including a large-flowered magnolia and a laciniated beech. In 1987, the Garden of the Senses and Scents was added to Helvétie Promenade. The Garden is especially dedicated to the visually impaired; plants were selected for their specific smells, or touch, and signs are in both Braille and print.

Observatory Park: created in 1904 at the request of Auguste Lebeuf, director of the astronomical observatory. Here, you will see a copper beech, a weeping beech, sweet chestnut and pine trees.

Castan Square: a handkerchief garden at the foot of the Citadel containing ancient ruins, shrouded in mystery: such is the setting of this little emerald gem in the heart of the city.

Clos Barbizier: created in 1988 in the protection afforded by the ramparts of Fort Griffon in picturesque Battant Quarter, it has a large variety of roses.

Glacis Promenade: created in the mid-19th century and landscaped by Brice Michel and architect Maurice Boutterin, the Promenade offers a panoramic view over the city.

The Botanical Garden: the first botanical garden was created in 1580; proof, if proof were needed, that the Bisontins did not wait for green to be popular before acting! Once a time, dozens different sites were chosen and then abandoned, when finally, in 1957, Lesdrie Square became THE place to plant and stay put. The Garden’s aims are cultural, scientific and conservational; it is jointly owned by the City and the University.

Granvelle Promenade: the gardens, Wallace Fountain, the statues, colonnades and the distinguished buildings that crown it lend undeniable charm to this vast square in the city centre. It was part of the private grounds of Granvelle Palace (16th century); the city bought it in 1712 and opened it to the public.

GARENDETOURS...

33

GREEN, GREEN, GREEN

With 2,408 hectares of green, including 2,000 hectares of forests, Besançon asserts its rightful status as the first green city in France, with 204 m² of green space per capita. While Chailluz Forest alone accounts for one quarter of the total area of the town, green is all around and is displayed in every possible hue right into the heart of the city, even in its narrowest of tiny lanes. Gardens, parks, promenades, tree-lined embankments ... so many invitations to leave the car keys in your pocket and walk headed into the wind, straight for the greenery.

The Casino garden, Mirond Park and Helvétie Promenade: on the right bank of the Doubs, these public gardens, landscaped with lawns and flowering leafy lanes are very 1900’s in atmosphere. Mirond Park, 3 hectares, has over 400 trees including a large-flowered magnolia and a laciniated beech. In 1987, the Garden of the Senses and Scents was added to Helvétie Promenade. The Garden is especially dedicated to the visually impaired; plants were selected for their specific smells, or touch, and signs are in both Braille and print.

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The Gare d’Eau Park
THE FRENCH CAPITAL OF BIODIVERSITY

Besançon has been awarded the French Capital of Biodiversity in recognition of its green spaces and active environmental policies. The city has been praised for its active environmental programmes, the certification of community forests, and the "zero pesticide" policy for its parks and gardens.

The Citadel: Guardian of Biodiversity

One of the lesser-known missions of the Natural History Museum of Besançon is to illustrate and preserve biodiversity. And so the species around Franche-Comté (the crayfish, the Rhône gingel Asper, and the Great Alsace Hamster) receive a lot of attention at the Citadel. Thanks to the Besançon preservation programme, the Citadel is home to more exotic creatures, such as the Hercules Beetle from the Lesser Antilles (a king-size rhinoceros beetle with distinctive behaviour), the rock wallaby, and the bald ibis. You will even find the Madagascan “Panda” and the Sifaka (Crowned Sifaka), extremely rare lemurs who are particularly pampered here. These animals are ex situ ambassadors for their wild fellow creatures, and their precious (even unique) presence helps to ensure the preservation of their species.

FORESTS AT THE GATES OF THE CITY

Besançon has over 200 km of hiking trails: GR 15 is a national hiking trail in Franche-Comté and the Jura and the local GR, which includes the Miliez, the Blanzyon path, and the hills, cliffs and forts that surround the city. They are all excellent opportunities for your walking shoes.

At the 13 hectares open-air Museum of Franche-Comté Houses in Nancray there are about 30 traditional Franche-Comté buildings reassembled stone by stone. It is a living museum that conserves the architectural heritage of Franche-Comté... and it does even more. There are reconstructed biotopes of each micro-region, and themed gardens: kitchen gardens in the mountains, gardens of almost-forgotten vegetables, of fibres and dye plants.

The Saône Wetlands: on the first Jura plateau, above Besançon, there is a large river that begins the plain formed in karst region, with a singular water ecosystem. The Wetlands cover almost 1,300 hectares with an average altitude of 108 meters. This wetland is key for the drinking water supply of 51,500 inhabitants of Besançon (nearly half the population).

Explore amazing and mysterious karst forms, shapes, columns, holes... at the gates of Besançon: descend into the Osselle Caves or the Poudrey Chasm or wander along the Mérey-sous-Montrond hiking trail.
OH! THE BEAUTIFUL LOOP!

The Doubs Loop deserves a capital letter because it encapsulates Besançon’s identity. It is precisely because of this bend in the river, which contours the foot of a hill, that Besançon was born. The first people, who came before the arrival of Julius Caesar, settled this square kilometre, protected both by the river and the steep slopes of Mount Saint Stephen. Today’s historical centre is the area that is within the famous Loop and also that which extends to the Battant Quarter, just across the river. First because of a ford, and then because of the first bridge the Romans built, Battant stretched out along the right bank and then up, in perfect counterpoint to the Citadel which has stood for four centuries atop Mount Saint Stephen.

THE DOUBS

This is an undated river, which wanders for a while, gets lost, makes an about-face and changes course altogether. From its source at Mouthe on the plateau of the Haut-Doubs to Verdun-sur-le-Doubs where it joins the Saône, it travels 458 km as the crow flies. From its point of departure, the Doubs travels to the northeast, leaps down from a height of 27 metres and even goes off on a brief jaunt into Switzerland before it runs to the west. It next heads a few degrees north to Moutierd’Arey, then plots its course towards the southeast. It finally settles down, and drops into a soft green valley. This is where it follows the contours of the hills on which Besançon and its surrounding communities grew before it slips on to Dole and the Saône Plain.

THE RIVER TUNNEL UNDER THE CITADEL

Construction of the river tunnel under the Citadel was begun in 1878 under the direction of an Italian builder based in Lausanne, and it was opened in 1882. The canal connects the Rivotte and Tarragnoz Quarters, saving barges from going around the whole town via the bend in the Doubs. The canal has a pedestrian walkway. It is a picturesque place, popular with recreational boaters and sightseeing boats.

MARINAS

Greater Besançon has three marinas and over 70 moorings for recreational boating in the heart of the city or on its outskirts. The Deluz Marina is upstream from Besançon andSaint Paul’s Mill River Port and Marina is in the town centre. The Centre of the Arts Marina, the most recent, is across from the Citadel, and has moorings for boats up to 15 metres long. It is a full-service marina for boat maintenance and navigation assistance. For you and your boat, Besançon is a must-stop destination.
The river has imprinted the city with its presence and contours. It gives Besançon embankments, parks and gardens, all of which call out to you for walks and strolls.

In 1881 a site at Boussières, downstream from Besançon, was bought to set up a paper mill. The driving force of the Doubs was the determiner. The first paper machine began operating in 1883. Since then, production has continued and grown. The company produces high-quality fine paper, selected for the luxury market. They now have a new line from an eco-design procedure: a tree-free paper (the Bagasse®)! They have guided group tours.

Whether you take a sightseeing boat or an electric boat, whether you go with a group, family or solo, taking to the river is a great way to discover Besançon from a different angle and at a different pace.

Electric boats are quiet, easy to handle, stable and accessible to all. They are ecologically respectful of the river and its banks and as you glide along, you have stunning panoramic views of Besançon and its fortifications. The boats have a maximum capacity of 7, and you can meet them on the half-hour at St. Paul’s Mill River Port and Marina, Doubs Plaisance: +33 (0)6 71 17 91 29.

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WATER POWER AND THE ZUBER-RIEDER PAPER MILL

In 1966 it became clear that the boat had not really taken its retirement. It became a restaurant. It features tapas and traditional cuisine. And then, just crossing the bridge will take you to the left bank and another barge, also retired from the river trade, but this one has become a Bed and Breakfast!

EATING AND SLEEPING ON THE DOUBS

AAfter a respectable shipping career begun in 1907, a barge, now called the "D’Calé", is moored along the beautiful promenade of Micaud Park, on the right bank of the Doubs. From Beijing to Besançon in a few turns of the wheel! These new generation bicycle taxi drivers offer an alternative transport that is both relaxing and green. The driver uses an electrically-assisted tricycle to take you on an errand or a discovery trip through Besançon and its environs. You just need to give the driver a quick wave to hear, "Montez, je vous emmène où?"… or: "Hop in, where to?"

THE CITY BY BIKE

Eurovélo 5 takes you from Nantes to Budapest along the banks of the big rivers and canals of Europe… and passes through Franche-Comté and Besançon! So, there is not another way to see Besançon: go from the Hoppe layover to the Velode Bridge, via the river tunnel. Bicycles and pantographs indicate the designated sections of the bikeway, tourist attractions and service areas.

Eco-friendly, folding electric bikes, this is the invention of the Besançon-based company Sun City! The design is equalled only by its performance and the pleasure of an (almost) effortless ride into the sunset.

VÉLOCITÉ

Vélocité offers 200 self-service bicycles at over 30 bike parks in the city centre with passes for a few hours or for several months, this is a Station that is appreciated as much by Besantins as it is by tourists!

STROLLING ALONG

The river has imprinted the city with its presence and contours. It gives Besançon embankments, parks and gardens, all of which call out to you for walks and strolls.
EXPERIENCE BESANÇON!

Strolling into the wind, pushing open a museum door, taking a seat at a table on the terrace, going to the market, learning, being amazed, delighting in meeting someone or discovering something in a square or on the embankments... We invite you to discover Besançon and experience the city and its surroundings whether you are with your family, on a romantic weekend or in a group... In the form of a travel diary, here are some ideas, itineraries, addresses and tips to fully experience the vibrancy of Besançon... from the inside. For a day, a weekend or a week, let yourself slip into Bisontine life.

> Family Picnic at the Citadel

40 41

5.00 pm: You arrive in one of the charming boutique in the city centre. A magic place caught midway between the murmur of the city and the tranquillity of the gardens and inner courtyards.
6.00 pm: A trip to the Saint Amour Square is a must, of course. Pretty boutiques, a shady, welcoming square, elegant façades of buildings... Make a wish, and Saint Amour can make it come true!
7.30 pm: From courtyard to inner courtyard where some amazing stairways rise above your heads: your walk has led you to Granvelle Square where you choose to dine.
10.00 pm: Enjoy the night and the lights of the city, wander around in Castan Square. The ruins of ancient columns and the lush vegetation create a magic moment.
10.30 pm: Return to your hotel.

> Breakfast below the Citadel © Jack Varlet

5.00 am: Breakfast for a king because you have decided to explore Besançon and its environs by bike. A Vélocité bike park is within easy walking distance! You are off pedalling along the towpaths and Eurovélo 6 (for the less athletically inclined, there are electric bikes for rent!).
12.30 pm: At La Malate, Roche-lez-Beaupré or Avanne-Aveney, upstream or downstream, there’s no shortage of charming restaurants where you can take a break. Depending on your route (and the pace of your trip), you’ll find a restaurant you like as easily in the villages as in the city.
2.30 pm: You are back on the bike and heading back towards the city, still cycling along the lovely banks of the Doubs.
4.30 pm: You take time to relax at the hotel.
5.30 pm: A stroll and tea in town. You savour the Besançon atmosphere, and check out restaurants.
7.30 pm: The Embankments, Marbaret Square, Bertaux Quarter, Rivière, rue Bertaux, the Fine Arts Market Quarter or the Theatre Quarter: where will you dine tonight?
10.30 pm: Cross the Doubs, and experience the exciting atmosphere of the Casino; then walk back to the hotel through Micaud Park in the soft, lovely night.

> Saint Amour Square

> Inner Courtyard

> Castan Square

> Breakfast just below the Citadel © Jack Varlet

AS A COUPLE

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Outside on the Terrace in Town

The City Centre from Fort Griffon

Granvelle Square

Children’s Tour at the Citadel

The Nancray Museum of Franche-Comté Houses

A hearty breakfast, just right to start this completely Bisontine day.

The Museum of Time. A fun exploration of what made Besançon’s reputation, and why it is called the City of Time. The children get caught up in the games...

A drink at the nearby Granvelle Square before storming the Citadel.

Lunch up there, followed by tours of the museums and gardens of this must-see UNESCO World Heritage Site. Again, between the zoos and the museums, there is something for everyone!

Back down into town. Shopping for the girls, a break at “home” for the boys. You’ll catch up with each other at 7.30 in the Bersot Quarter where restaurants abound.

A last walk, through the Rivotte Quarter, for a look at the Citadel, all lit up.

Wake up to a delicious breakfast and then you head over to the market to get picnic food and to fill up on regional products.

Set out for the Museum of Franche-Comté Houses in Nancray. Living Heritage has never been so aptly named! Special events, interactive tours, animals: everything is there!

Picnic at the Museum and then depart for Osselle Caves.

Tour of the Caves and... sadly, that’s all folks for this time!

You drop your bags and settle into a guesthouse in the old centre. You are below the Citadel, near the shops, with a view of the city’s roofs, and you can hear the chiming of the Astronomical Clock. The children have chosen their rooms and are already getting impatient to get out and explore.

9.00 am: A hearty breakfast, just right to start this completely Bisontine day.

10.00 am: The Museum of Time. A fun exploration of what made Besançon’s reputation, and why it is called the City of Time. The children get caught up in the games...

11.30 am: A drink at the nearby Granvelle Square before storming the Citadel.

12.30 pm: Lunch up there, followed by tours of the museums and gardens of this must-see UNESCO World Heritage Site. Again, between the zoos and the museums, there is something for everyone!

5.30 pm: Back down into town. Shopping for the girls, a break at “home” for the boys. You’ll catch up with each other at 7.30 in the Bersot Quarter where restaurants abound.

10.00 pm: A last walk, through the Rivotte Quarter, for a look at the Citadel, all lit up.

You stroll around in the Loop. Between the tempting shops and discovering the architectural heritage, there’s something interesting for everyone here. From Saint John’s Cathedral to Revolution Square (Fine Arts Market Quarter), Besançon gradually reveals its delights to you.

9.00 am: Wake up to a delicious breakfast and then you head over to the market to get picnic food and to fill up on regional products.

10.00 am: Set out for the Museum of Franche-Comté Houses in Nancray. Living Heritage has never been so aptly named! Special events, interactive tours, animals: everything is there!

1.00 pm: Pointe at the Museums and then depart for Osselle Caves.

2.30 pm. Tour of the Caves and... badly, that’s all folks for this time!

Please contact the Besançon Visitor and Convention Centre for help with designing your own Besançon exploration.
With the Rhine-Rhone TGV connections, Besançon is closer than ever to major French cities:
- Paris: 2 hrs 5 min
- Strasbourg: 1 hr 40 min
- Milan: 3 hrs 45 min

Useful addresses...

LEISURE & CULTURE
- • Victor Hugo Cinema •
- • Centre of the Arts, Music Conservatory and Exhibition Hall
- • La Rodia •
- • Botanical Garden •
- • Clos Barbizier Rose Garden •
- • Garden of the Senses •
- • Maison de la presse (International Press) •
- • Saint Paul's Marina •
- • New Theatre •
- • City Public Library •
- • Covered Market •
- • Ruty Army Barracks •
- • Rural Police Station •
- • City Police Station •
- • Victor Hugo’s Birthplace •
- • Mosaic at Lumière Middle School •
- • Cordeliers Tower •
- • Chamars Tower •
- • Square Tower •
- • Fountain of The Ladies •
- • Poor Clares’ Fountain •
- • Carmel Fountain •
- • Archdiocese •
- • Saint Madeleine’s Church •
- • Battant Bridge •
- • Protestant Church and Holy Spirit Gallery •
- • Saint Jacques’ Hospital •
- • Prefecture •
- • Seminary •
- • Church of Our Lady •
- • Theatre •
- • Saint John’s Cathedral / Astronomical Clock •
- • Saint Maurice’s Church •
- • Granvelle Palace / Museum Of Time •
- • Courthouse •
- • Town Hall •