



ITINERARY

Vallée
du
Loir

LA FLÈCHE





SOME HISTORY...

THE TOWN'S ORIGINS

The Loir is a natural border between the former Andes (Anjou) and Cénomans (Maine) regions. Until the Revolution La Flèche was part of the former province of Anjou.

La Flèche was established as a border crossing point for the Loir. In the Gallo-Roman period the two routes crossed the territory of the current town (Angers-Tours and Tours-Jublains). They crossed paths in the west of the town, not far from Notre-Dame des Vertus chapel. A Gallo-Roman habitat was found close by. Notre-Dame des Vertus (the former Saint-Ouen church) was the town's first parish church.

THE MIDDLE AGES

The castle was built in the middle of the 11th century on an island in the middle of the Loir. It provided protection against crossings. That is when a new town began to develop, not far from the castle, on the right bank of the river. Saint-Thomas church was founded at the beginning of the 12th century, and replaced the former Saint-Ouen parish. The town grew around two main routes: Grande Rue (east-west) and rue Basse (north-south, now rue Grollier) with a junction, the "Grand-Carroi". During the Middle Ages, the town was

protected by a surrounding wall, accessed through gates (porte Notre-Dame, porte St-Jacques, porte St-Germain, porte Mancelle and porte de Paris).

THE RENAISSANCE

In 1538, a new castle was built in the north of the town (where the Prytanée is now) by Françoise d'Alençon, King Henry IV of France's grandmother. At the time the town's main activities were farming, weaving, and trade, thanks to the traffic on the Loir. The town was also the headquarters for a judicial authority with power over a small territory.





THE GOLDEN AGE OF LA FLÈCHE

The end of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century were the golden age of the history of La Flèche. The town was indulged by Henry IV, who had spent part of his childhood there, as well as by his close advisor, Guillaume Fouquet de la Varenne, originally from La Flèche. In 1603 Henry IV gave his family castle to the Jesuit priests to establish a “collège”, which meant university at the time. It gained rapid success with as many as 1,000 students in 1610, including the philosopher, René Descartes. Also a “présidial”, an important tribunal, was established at La Flèche in 1595. The jurisdiction included part of Maine and Anjou. Until the end of the 17th century, the town was under construction: the university buildings, the Fouquet de la Varenne castle, many convents attracted by the prestigious Jesuit university, mansions for the magistrates and public service employees, reconstruction of the town’s surrounding wall, etc. At the end of the 17th century, the population of the town was approximately 5,000.

This fever for construction, though less active, continued until the 18th century. Several beautiful mansions from that era are still standing, near the Fouquet de la Varenne castle, and on the town’s main roads. A town hall was built in 1737, then rebuilt thirty years later with a much larger plan which included a covered seed market.

The banishment of the Jesuits in 1762 was a blow to the university’s prestige. The former university’s buildings are now home to the Gentilshommes du Roi school.

1. Notre Dame des Vertus chapel, a small Roman church, embellished in the 17th and 18th centuries by the university’s fathers.

2. A drawing of Brother Martellange who came in the beginning of the 17th century to continue the construction of the Saint Louis church.



THE SUB-PREFECTURE IN THE 19th CENTURY

At the time of the Revolution, La Flèche joined the Sarthe and became the sub-prefecture of the department. The town conserved its role in education thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte who, in 1808, established the Prytanée military academy in the buildings of the former Jesuit university.

The sub-prefecture needed to acquire prestigious buildings in line with its rank. So the small theatre (1839), the sub-prefecture building (around 1860), and a statue of Henry IV (1857) on the main town square, were built. At the same time, new squares were created (now place de la Libération), streets opened (now rue Galliéni), boulevards replaced the former town wall, and the quays were improved with the plantation of trees, making them delightful promenades.

The railway arrived at La Flèche in 1870, reinforcing the town's economic development. New districts developed, in the north (the Parc des Dames development), and in the south (the train station district).

TODAY

The town continued to develop in the 20th century, particularly with the addition of the former Ste-Colombe, St-Germain-du-Val and Verron communes. As a result, vast industrial parks grew on route de Sablé and route du Mans, with specialised industries, such as printing, for eg. Brodard and Taupin, printer of the famous "Livre de Poche", a paperback collection. The town has continued to follow its educational vocation. It has even expanded with the establishment of several junior and senior secondary schools (including the secondary school attached to the Prytanée). Tourism is also an important source for the town's economy: the famous zoo is the department's most important attraction, and the 2nd in the Pays de la Loire, with over 300,000 visitors every year.

This dynamism is shown in the quality of certain recent public buildings, such as the extension of the town hall (the Carmes castle site), the Coppélia concert hall, and the coach station/tourist information centre.

La Flèche, with a distinctive and remarkable density of architectural heritage, is in the heart of the Loir Valley, a land of art and history.



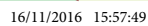
1. View of the new Parc des Dames district opened in 1840 after the closing of the Notre Dame convent.

2. View of the mills on the Loir from the Luneau port.

3. The Fouquet de la Varenne pavilion, the only remains of the castle built in the 17th century.

4. A historical image of the Carmes castle during restoration.







→ SHORT ITINERARY



DISCOVERY

ITINERARY

THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE ITINERARIES:

“SHORT ITINERARY”: AN APPROX. 1HR 15MIN TOUR OF THE TOWN’S MAIN MONUMENTS;

“LONG ITINERARY”: AN APPROX. 2HR TOUR (EXCL. OPTIONS) WHICH RETRACES THE TOWN’S HISTORY WITH SUGGESTIONS OF ADDITIONAL VISITS.

Starting point: rue du Maréchal Galliéni at the bridge.

1- CHÂTEAU DES CARMES-TOWN HALL

The only remaining part of the old medieval castle of La Flèche is the former dungeon. It was built by René d’Alençon from 1476 and still overlooks the Loir. Today only about a third of this tower remains. At the end of the 19th century it was flanked on the south side by two small overhanging Neo-Gothic turrets. On the islands and islets which crowd the river bed a second pole grew, with outbuildings and the Notre-Dame de Chef-du-Pont chapel, important pilgrimage site.

between the castle, the Loir and the Carmes park - a play of reflections with glassed surfaces, fragmentation and circulation between the different areas.

Adrien Fainsilber is the architect of the Compiègne university, Evry hospital, the head office of UNEDIC in Paris, and the Cité des Sciences et de l’Industrie. He was chief architect of the urban development zone, ZAC Port Marianne-Richter in Montpellier from 1990 to 2007 when he retired.

In 1620 Louis XIII gave the ruins of the former castle to the Carmelite order. They built the main block of a residence and a cloister. The Carmes castle became private property during the Revolution, then was bought by the town in 1909. From then it housed the town hall, municipal museum and library. In 1919 some of the old buildings were ruined in a fire, which also destroyed the library and museum. In 1994 new buildings were constructed by the architect, Adrien Fainsilber, with Philippe Bodinier and Roland Korenbaum, towering over the Loir. The new group of buildings are

2- THE CARMES BRIDGE

The Medieval bridge was swept away by a flood in 1665. Retrieved once in 1680, it was finally rebuilt in its current state between 1855 and 1857. From the bridge you can see the old Poil-de-Reux flour mills (left bank) and the Grands Moulins Le Roy (right bank - now the Quatre Saisons restaurant). On the right bank lies the Luneau port.

Go straight ahead.





3- LUNEAU PORT

The commercial vitality of the town relied on the port's activity for many years. Boats still came from the Loire in the 19th century to unload wine and spirits from the Bordeaux, Saintonge and Nantes regions, "tuffeau" stone from the Saumur region, tiles from Angers, bricks and tiles from the Rairies kilns, pottery, glass bottles, salt and groceries, etc.

It was also the port where, between 1640 and 1659, over 300 men, women and children from the La Flèche area and surrounding provinces embarked for Canada, following Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière.

4- RUE GALLIÉNI

This road was built in 1838 to create an access from place du Pilon to the new quay. Look at the roof of no.2 where you can see a rare 18th century finial made from varnished clay from the village of Ligron, near La Flèche.

5- PLACE HENRI IV

Formerly the pillory place, this was once the biggest square in the town, where the markets were held. The statue of Henry IV dates back to 1857, ordered from the sculptor, Bonnassieux. Henry IV is depicted in armour as a reminder of the military role of the Prytanée, and holds the

edict of the foundation of the Jesuit university in his right hand. The facades around the square date back to the 19th century.

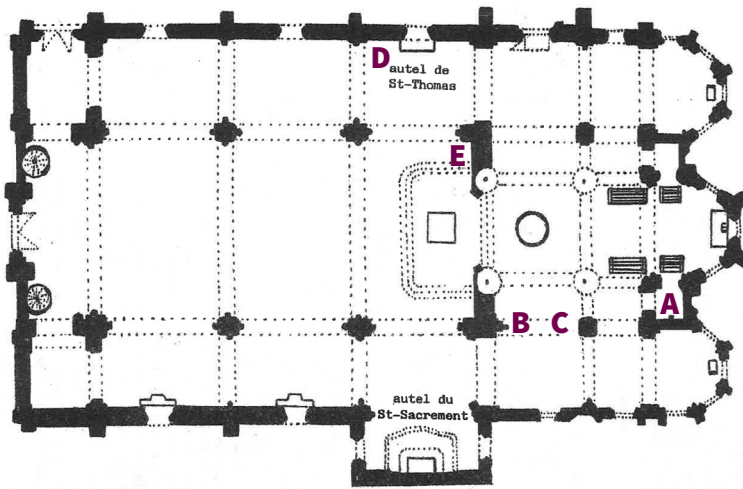
6- FORMER HOSPITAL BUILDING, NOW THE TRIBUNAL

In rue Saint-Thomas, near the church, are the buildings of the former hospital, which were converted into a prison and a tribunal at the beginning of the 19th century. The hospital was founded and built in 1634 by Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière, a tax collector in La Flèche, who was also the initiator of the Congregation of the Religious Hospitallers of Saint-Joseph.

1. This statue was erected in 1857, an expression of La Flèche population's gratitude to their King.

2. Image of the former hospital (17th century) and the St Thomas church





Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière is best known as the instigator of the Ville-Marie foundation which became Montreal in Canada. To that end Le Royer de la Dauversière created the Société des Messieurs de Montréal in 1634. It was assigned to find support and resources necessary to buy the island discovered by Jacques Cartier on the Saint-Laurent river. It was also responsible for organising the “colony recruits” from Anjou, Maine, Normandy who embarked from La Flèche, via the Nantes and La Rochelle ports, for a long and dangerous three-month journey to Canada.

7- SAINT-THOMAS CHURCH

This medieval church still has the chancel, transept (part of which is under the steeple) and parts of the 12th century portal, re-used in the current portal which opens out the square. The monument was heavily restored in the second part of the 19th century. Of particular interest are the rich furnishings and ornaments, particularly the many terracotta statues from the 17th century typical of the Maine and Anjou regions (such as: the marriage of the Virgin [A], Sainte Barbe [B], Saint Sébastien [C], Saint Thomas, [D]). The paintings include the Assumption of the Virgin which is the work of Claude Vignon

(1629) [E], one of France's most famous 17th century painters. It comes from the former Jesuit university. The stained-glass windows were made in the 19th century in the Sarthe workshops.

8- GRANDE RUE

The town's main road, Grande Rue (former grand chemin Mançais, which roughly follows the line of the former antique route which led to Mans) is still a shopping street. It is lined with old mansions (16th and 17th century). Many of the facades were reworked in the 19th century. However there are still some wrought-iron balconies from the 18th century, such as at numbers 17 and 19.





1. Example of a wrought-iron balcony from the 18th century.

2. Image of the old ditches, boulevard Jean Moulin.

3. Parc des Dames “new district”

Long itinerary: continue along rue Lyonnaise and turn right into Grande Rue.

Short itinerary: follow rue Lyonnaise, cross Grande Rue and continue straight ahead along rue Bertrand Toutain, then left onto the Marché au Blé square. Return to the itinerary at **17**

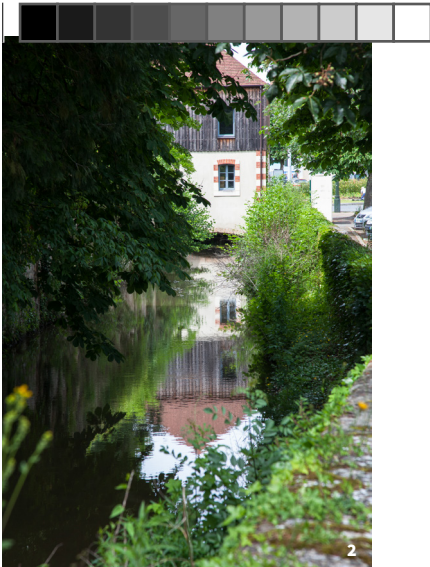
11- GRANDE RUE

This part of Grande Rue has many 17th, 18th and 19th century mansions. The most beautiful are no. 74 (with its sober 18th century facade), no.78 (built in the 1820s), no.57 (a harmonious and imposing 18th century facade), no.80 (built in 1717, this mansion still has a beautiful sculpted gate), no.84 (an elegantly sober 19th century facade), and finally, the beautiful 18th century mansion, between courtyard and garden, now occupied by a bank. Opposite, you can see an extremely beautiful wrought-iron balcony dating from the 18th century featuring a grimacing mask. Grande Rue finishes at the porte Mancelle, which opens between two towers.

Turn left into boulevard Jean Moulin.

OPTION:

A bit further is the beginning of the rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, which also has several beautiful mansions. Those on the pair-numbered side date back to the 19th century. You can go as far as no. 41, one of the grandest mansions in the town, built in the 18th century, with a pediment featuring a sundial. Go back to boulevard Jean-Moulin.



12- THE FORMER RAMPARTS

Boulevard Jean-Moulin follows the old moats of the city wall, rebuilt and reinforced at the end of the 16th century. The ramparts surrounded the whole town on the right bank of the Loir. It was gradually destroyed from the 18th century.

OPTION:

Former Convent of the Visitation
Visit by appointment.

Go to place Thiers, turn right into rue Ravenel then rue Henri Dunant.

The Convent of the Visitation was built between 1650 and 1680. It was part of the crown of religious establishments which encircled the town from the 17th century, attracted by the prestigious Jesuit university. The hospital was transferred into the former convent in 1802. From the street you can see a plaque in honour of Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière.

Go to place Thiers and turn left into rue Française.

13- THE NEW PARC DES DAMES DISTRICT

We are now in a district which was entirely created in the 1830s in the park of the Ave Maria convent, known as Parc des Dames. The orthogonal layout of the streets of the district, lined with aesthetic and regular 19th century facades are proof of their recent construction. The district exudes perfect harmony due to the regular alignment of the facades along the street, and the similar height and organisation of the bourgeois houses. However each bears a difference, with the choice of rendering or rusticated stone, the framework of the doors and windows, the variety of the design and colour of the woodwork, etc. The heart of the district is the Champ de Foire square, where the cattle market was held until the beginning of the 20th century.



14- THE FORMER RAMPARTS

Boulevard d'Alger is now where the ditches of the northern wall of the ramparts were situated. The name of the rue du Rempart is a reminder of this. At the east entrance to the boulevard, at no.36, there is an unusually high, narrow house. Built in the beginning of the 17th century, against the old rampart, it is possible that the available space prevented the building being any bigger.

Continue straight ahead on rue du 11 novembre 1918 then turn left into rue de la Dauversière.

15- RUE DE LA DAUVERSIÈRE

Pass in front of Jérôme Le Royer de la Dauversière's house, indicated by a plaque (numbers 31 and 33).

Turn right into the little rue Verneville.

16- HUGER MANSION

At no.10, a majestic porch leads to the courtyard of one of the town's most beautiful mansions. It is sometimes open to the public for contemporary art exhibitions. This is the Huger mansion, which bears the name of its owner who was a lawyer at the La Flèche tribunal. He ordered the residence in 1704 from one of the most famous architects of the period, Jacques Gabriel, architect to the King.

Jacques V Gabriel (1667-1742): first engineer of bridges and roads, then became first architect to the King. He trained in the Jules Hardouin-Mansart agency. He was one of the promoters of the Rocaille style in the beginning of the 18th century. His main works include: place Louis XV (now the place de la Mairie) in Rennes, place Royale in Bordeaux, and mansions on the place Vendôme in Paris.

Cross the car park on the right and follow rue du Mouton across the street.





17- PLACE DU MARCHÉ AU BLÉ

The square is dominated by one of the town's most important public buildings: the theatre and covered wheat market. The building originally had two roles: the covered wheat market on the ground floor, and the town hall on the first floor. As you see it today, the building dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries: the central part and the left wing date back to 1771, whereas the right wing (the “tuffeau” stone is slightly more yellow) dates from the 1830s. The right wing is home to a charming Italian-style theatre, one of France's smallest. It became known as the “bonbonnière” or sweet box as soon as it was inaugurated in 1839. Recently restored, it has a regular programme of performances and concerts.

The details which decorate the pediment of the facade are a reminder of features typical of La Flèche in the 19th century: to the left of the clock, the canon, the axe, the bugle and the flag are reminders of the Prytanée military academy; whilst on the other side, a boat sail, the pole used to steer the “chaland” (river boat), and the flail and ears of wheat are reminders of the port and farming activities. The town hall was transferred to the Carmes castle in 1909. The former covered market on

the ground floor now hosts exhibitions.

On the north side of the square, at no. 5, is an imposing 17th century mansion.

Take rue du Collège on the left.

1. This house dating from the 17th century was once part of the Notre Dame convent.

2. Theatre and covered wheat market

3. Image inside the theatre after restorations in 1999.





1. Image inside the Prytanée library.

2. Image of Saint Louis du Prytanée church and the altarpiece designed by Pierre Corbineau.

3. Henry IV gate, the main doorway to the former Jesuit university

THE PRYTANÉE

The university was founded in 1603 by Henry IV, who gave the Jesuits the castle built by his grandmother. Immediately, the Jesuits began a remarkable architectural programme based on five courtyards aligned between the town wall and rue du Collège. The first stage was the construction of the “Salle des Actes” and Saint-Louis church, both finished in 1621. Gradually, throughout the first half of the 17th century, the Pensionnaires (boarders) and outbuilding courtyards were built. Followed by the Pères (fathers) courtyard (in front of the former Françoise d’Alençon castle), which also had an outbuilding courtyard. Behind this, on the other side of the ditch of the surrounding wall, a grand park was established in the former castle’s gardens. This layout remains today, despite the former castle being completely rebuilt in 1784. The best architects of the time participated in the construction: firstly Louis Métezeau, architect to the King, responsible for the Salle des Actes building and the first stage of the church, then Father Étienne Martellange, architect for the Jesuits, who reworked Métezeau’s project and finished the church with a Latin cross plan. In 1610, the King’s heart was placed in a cenotaph there. The heart of Queen Marie

de Médicis joined his in 1643. They were both burnt on the public square in 1793.

The Jesuits were banished from the kingdom in 1762. After this, the buildings housed the Gentilshommes-élèves du Roi military academy, then the Royal and Academic college in 1776. The military academies were closed in 1793, and the buildings were used by local authorities and La Flèche municipality. The church was converted into a meeting room for a revolutionary club. Finally, in 1808, following an order given by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Prytanée military academy was transferred from Saint-Cyr to La Flèche. The school dispenses a secondary education curriculum and prepares for the entrance examination to higher education military academies.

It is possible to visit the historical buildings and gardens of the Prytanée in summer.



18- RUE DU COLLÈGE: THE PRYTANÉE

No.19, the former Fromont-Godefroy haberdashery was an institution in the neighbourhood until recent years. The facade and interior, unchanged since the beginning of the 20th century, have been conserved.

In line with rue Henry IV, is the majestic gate of the former Jesuit university, now home to the Prytanée national military academy. The gate, built in 1653, was the last stage of the construction which lasted half a century. The elegant composition of the gate is typical of French architecture at the time: a quest for symmetry, stress on upward lines, the use of elements of antique architecture (pilasters, entablature, pediment, etc.) The decoration makes many references to the university's founder, King Henry IV: the bust of the monarch, arms and coat of arms, featuring the fleur-de-lis.

OPTION:

It is possible to cross rue du Parc which follows the former ditches of the town (still visible in rue des Fossés) as far as rue de la Magdeleine, in the suburb of the same name. There you will find the still impressive buildings of the former Magdeleine convent, now Notre-Dame senior secondary school. The convent was founded in 1688 by the nurses of the Augustinian order to confine penitent women whose families had requested their internment. In the 19th century, the buildings sheltered a private institution, predecessor of the existing secondary school. One of the main doors giving onto the street is overlooked by a beautiful 17th century terracotta statue of the Virgin and Child, protected in a niche.

Turn left into rue de la Cure.





19- THE PRESBYTERY

No.15, this small mansion, of which the oldest parts (building on the left) date back to the 15th century, was home to the sub-prefecture from 1814 to 1863. At the time an elegant two-story neoclassical portico was added to the facade. It is now the presbytery.

For the “short itinerary”, go straight ahead in rue St Thomas to return to place Henri IV (shown by an arrow on the map).

For the “long itinerary”, turn right into rue Carnot.

20- RUE CARNOT

Rue Carnot is part of the former grand chemin Mançais, an old route. To the west, beyond the ditches and former porte Saint-Jacques, the continuation of the road is named rue Saint-Jacques. It crosses the suburb bearing the same name which was established around a former priory.

The street still has several old mansions with beautiful wrought-iron balconies, an artwork in which La Flèche craftsmen excelled in the 18th century. The balcony of no.19 has a charming flowering basket. No.17 has three beautifully made Regency-style balconies.

Finally, at no.30 sober wrought-iron work from

the end of the 18th century give the facade a grand allure.

Turn left into rue du Dr Lhoste towards place de la Libération.

21- PLACE DE LA LIBÉRATION

At the end of the Middle Ages, this square was occupied by two convents: a community of Franciscan nuns, and a monastery for the Récollets brothers. The Franciscan convent was closed in 1788. The Récollets monastery was probably closed during the Revolution. Once the buildings were demolished, the land became the place d'Armes, on which the hearts of Henry IV and Marie de Médicis were burnt on 28th September 1793. In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the market and agricultural shows were held there.

In 1861, on the east side, the new sub-prefecture building was built in the brick-and-stone style inspired by Louis XIII's architecture.

At the end of the square, turn left into rue Pape-Carpantier.





1. This former mansion was home to the first sub-prefecture. Today it is a presbytery.

2. The sub-prefecture building, built by Pierre Félix Delarue, architect of the department.

3. Model of the statue of Léo Delibes' heroine, Lakmé.

3



22- RUE PAPE-CARPANTIER

The name of this street is a reminder of a remarkable personality: Marie Pape-Carpantier. The Marie Pape-Carpantier school is recognisable for its typical neoclassical architecture, with a beautiful door framed by Doric columns.

Marie Pape-Carpantier, born in La Flèche (1815-1878) fought for the condition of women and the education of young girls for her whole life. She was the founder of nursery schools, known as "maternelles". Her name was given to a La Flèche school in the street bearing the same name, of which she was the young principal in 1834.

Turn right into rue Fouquet de la Varenne.

23- PROMENADE DU MARÉCHAL-FOCH

After the construction of a quay in the middle of the 18th century, which was rebuilt a century later, the promenade was developed on the site of a former strand, called "Le Pré". Afterwards several elegant homes were built on the right side of the promenade, such as no.26, an elegant little 19th century mansion.

24- MONUMENT OF THE COMPOSER, LÉO DELIBES

At the end of the promenade, near the junction, is a monument celebrating the composer, Léo Delibes born in Saint-Germain-du-Val. It was inaugurated in 1899. The statue is signed by Laurent Marqueste. The bronze statue of Lakmé, molten by the Germans during the Second World War, was replaced by a replica based on the model of the original in 2000.

Léo Delibes (1836-1891): his most famous works are the ballet, Coppélia and the opera, Lakmé. Member of the Institut, teacher at the conservatory, he was one of the most revered musicians of his time.



«...IN THE EVENT OF OUR DEATHS, TAKE OUR HEARTS AND TRANSPORT THEM TO THE CHURCH OF THE COLLÈGE DE LA FLÈCHE...»

Founding edict of the La Flèche university by Henry IV in 1607.

Syndicat mixte du Pays Vallée du Loir

Pays d'art et d'histoire de la vallée du Loir

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Practical information:

Office de tourisme de la vallée
du Loir
02 43 38 16 60
www.vallee-du-loir.com

Discover the Loir valley, land of art and history

... with a specialised guide,
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The guide greets you. Your guide
is familiar with all the facets
of the Loir valley and tells you
everything you need to know to
understand the landscape and
history of the area through its
villages. The guide is ready to
answer your questions. Don't
hesitate.

Le service animation de l'architecture et du patrimoine (architecture and heritage activities department)

organises initiatives for the Loir
valley, land of art and history.
They propose activities all year
round for the local population,
tourists, and school groups. They
are available to discuss your
project.

The Loir valley belongs to the national network of "Villes et Pays d'art et d'histoire" (towns and regions with art and history)

The French Ministry for culture
and communication awards
the "Villes et Pays d'art et
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