

Ramble around the historic centre of Vitré, a recognised French Heritage Town (Ville d'Art et d'Histoire), and along the medieval streets and laneways. Saunter and walk in search of the gems of local heritage with this guide map of unmissable sights, spread across the city and countryside.

Really get away from it all and experience the history and art of the Vitré lifestyle, to enjoy at your own pace!



FIND OUT MORE

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17 SITES & POINTS OF VIEW

MUST-SEE SPOTS



Above the railway line, the footbridge over the multi-modal interchange hub will offer you a glimpse of all of Vitré's monuments, allowing you to imagine the rich history of this city. On the headland facing the castle, a chronological timeline allows you to situate each of them in the city's history. Nearby, you will find the former fur factory that is now home to the Jacques Duhamel cultural centre. Basically, enjoy an exceptional 360° view.



A symbol of the revitalisation of the city in the 19th century and built by Victor Lenoir (architect of the former Gare Montparnasse in Paris), the Vitré Station was officially opened in 1857 by Emperor Napoléon III. Back then, it was one of the phases of the Paris-Brest line. Today, the station offers a direct link to Rennes city centre in 20 minutes, and to Paris in less than 2hrs.



Easy to distinguish thanks to its location on a central island, this dwelling dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries. It is one of the most photographed attractions in Vitré. Along the length of rue de la Poterie, you will find many old merchants' houses with front porches: their first storeys are built out to the street, creating a covered alleyway suitable for trading. Today these house boutiques to keep all shopping addicts happy.



Witness the old walls of the city, the Bridole Tower and another tower (since disappeared) at the En-haut Gate situated to the south-west of the city. You can still see the wall-walk, arrow-slits and the gun loops there. Nearby, the Val walkway invites you to walk along the walls of the ancient walled city as far as Près des Lavandières Park.



The wash-house, at the start of Rue Pasteur, is reminiscent of the many others that would have been dotted along the banks of the river Vilaine at one time. This one is curved, following the flow of the river, and offering a unique vantage point for looking at the castle. Rue Pasteur also features pretty, coloured, half-timbered houses as well as a former tannery, harking back to the work with hides that was linked to the river. At the end of the street, the Gothic chevet of the Saint-Nicolas Monastery stands proud, established in the 17th Century. The sloping rue Rachapt, which gives its name to the neighbourhood, begins there. The name comes from the French word "rachat" meaning to "buy back" and it refers to the Hundred Years War between the French and the English. From the 16th to the 20th century, it was renowned for its outdoor knitting tables, which produced hand-made linen yarn stockings and slippers, for only a few pence. At the top end of the street, you will find the Trois-Marie chapel which towers over the quarter where time seems to stand still.



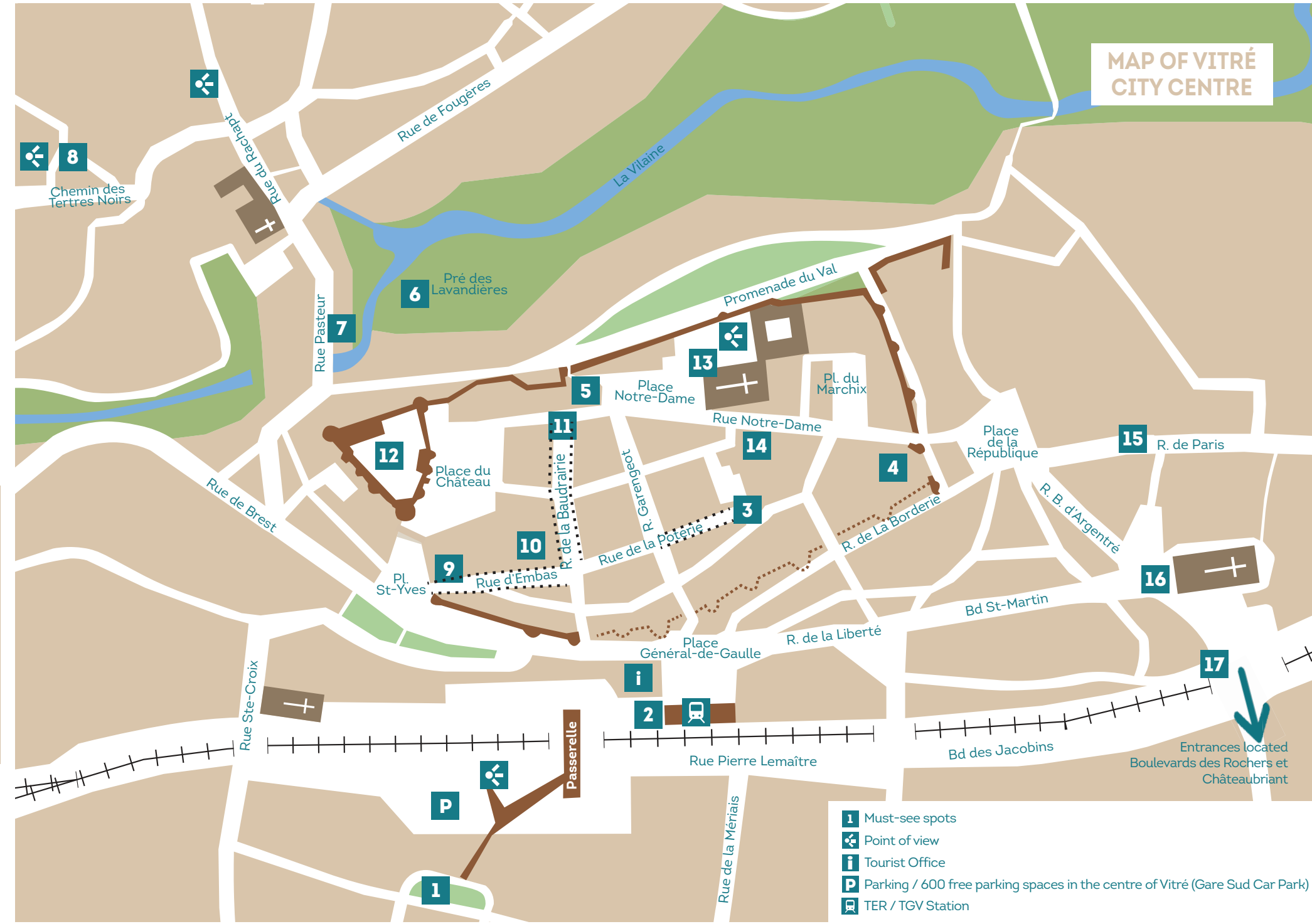
At the top of Rue D'embas, stop in at number 10. This 16th century building is one of Vitré's most distinctive and unusual hotels. Hôtel du Bol d'Or stands out for its sheer size and surprising architecture. Built in stone, the multi-sided tower and its beautifully decorated slate roofs make it a curiosity. To take in this magnificent dwelling and to get a taste of enjoying the Vitré way of life, the terraces of the nearby restaurants are an ideal spot.



Built in the 15th et 16th centuries, Notre-Dame church was flanked on the west by a cloth hall, and to the north by a Benedictine priory. Its south façade is the most unobstructed, it was more carefully built with rich decoration in the flamboyant Gothic style, at the apex, the exterior pulpit or around the doors. It features the so-called trademarks of the overseas traders, who as traders of hemp fabric, and travellers, contributed to funding it. To the north, the Benedictine Garden offers a unique panorama over the Vilaine river and its valley, while the former cloister houses the House of World Cultures, which is dedicated to remembering and promoting intangible cultural heritage.



TOURIST MAP  
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Situated to the north of the walls, St Peter's arch dates from the 12th and 15th centuries, it offers a view over the right hand side of Vitré. It is only one of the four original gates that remains intact, it allowed pedestrians and knights to enter the fortified city. The three other gates were the Embas gate to the west, the Gâtesel gate to the south, and the En-Haut Gate to the east.



You will have to climb a little in order to get here (from the middle of Rue du Rachapt) but it is worth the effort! You can take in the whole town in one view: The Barons Castle, the walls, the station, the Trémouille barracks, the Jacques Duhamel cultural centre, not forgetting the steeples of three churches: Notre-Dame, Saint-Martin and Sainte-Croix.



This cobbled narrow street has a medieval allure, the name harking back to time of artisan leather work done by the "baudroyers" or harness makers, and its large corbelled houses are worth a look. Looking upwards, sometimes the roofs seem to be almost touching. Those passionate about history, or lovers of beautiful stone and sculpted details simply must pass through this pretty narrow street.



Built in the Renaissance style in the 16th century Étienne Ringues, Sieur of the Troussans, this particular former hotel faces the Notre-Dame church. You can imagine the social status of this trader by looking at the building, built in an L shape, of stone, and located right in the heart of the town.



The bell tower, situated in the Saint-Martin cemetery, is the only remnant of the old church of the suburb. In the 19th century, the arrival of the railway, followed by the 70th Infantry Regiment moving in, led to the construction of new areas to the south of Vitré, which needed a bigger church. The church was therefore built from 1868 to 1893 by the Mellet architects in a Neo-Roman style. Listed as a Historic Monument, it features mosaics on the ground done by the father of the Odorico family. His son went on to embellish some of the new bourgeois villas in the area with his beautiful Art-Deco mosaics.



On the banks of the Vilaine river, this little haven of greenery is the ideal spot for a picturesque break in the heart of the city. While you are here, take some time to admire the castle, and watch the flowing Vilaine river, which now flows gently since dams were built upstream. A new 3km development has reclaimed the Vilaine valley, on which Vitré is built. You will also be able to see the ancient Bouin Tannery of the 19th century (see info - No. 7 Not to Miss).



The gate itself has disappeared, but you can see its former location on the cobblestones. While making your way up the street, take the time to admire the many half-timbered houses. Symbolic of the flourishing trade of hemp fabrics from the 14th au 16th century, some of these houses were built by members of the Brotherhood of Overseas Merchants. Today, the ancient boutiques have been replaced by restaurants and bars.



Located on its rocky spur since the 11th century, and rebuilt from the 13th au 15th century, Vitré Castle stands proudly! Responsible for defending the Duchy of Brittany, independent until 1488, then home to the Vitré Barons of the Middle-Ages, this castle has a long history. It also houses special events throughout the year. The museum, housed inside the castle, allows you to take a look back over more than 500 years of the history of the town.

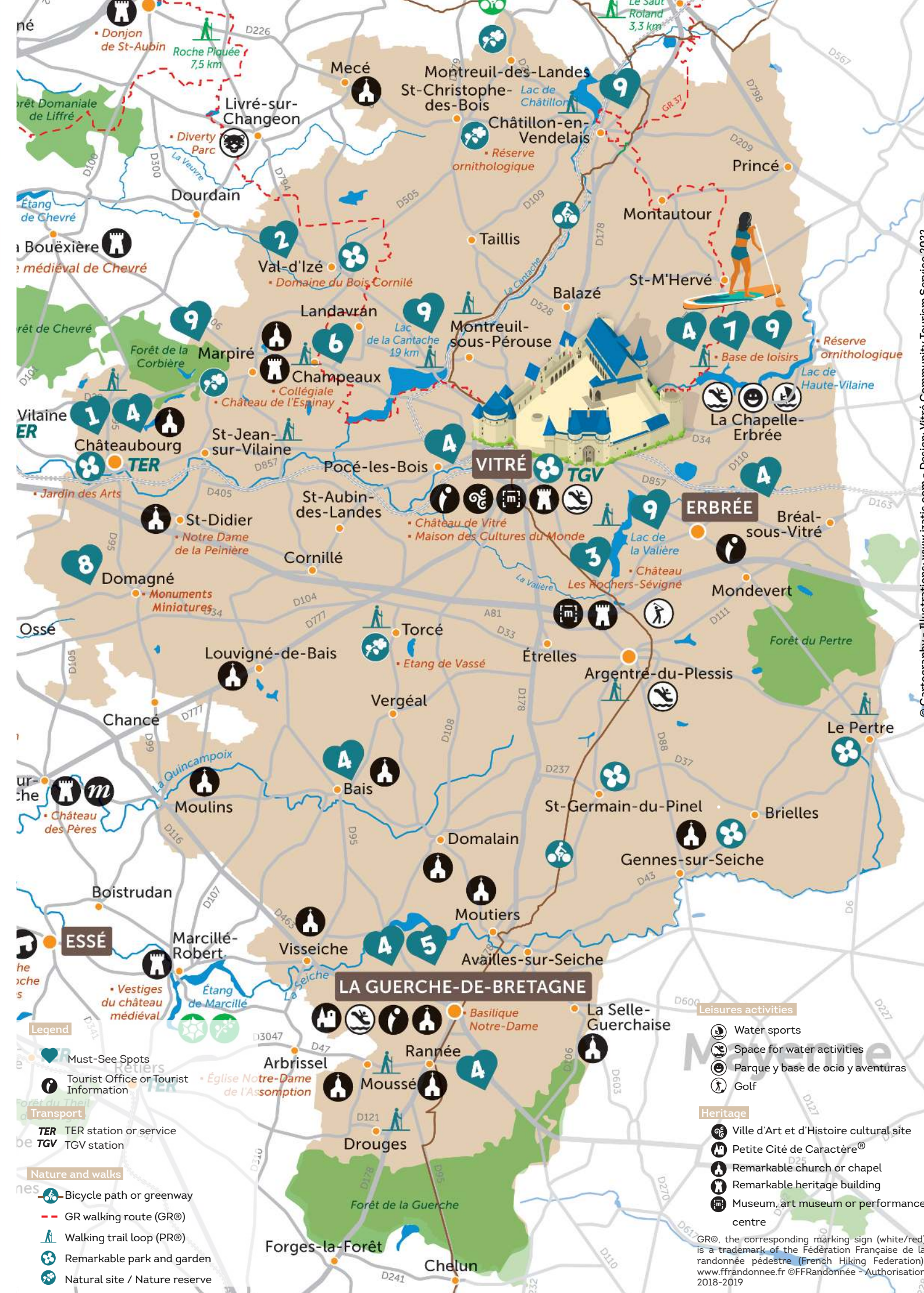


Situated to the east of the walled city, the beautiful half-timbered houses with porches have been preserved, (at No. 15, 19, 21, 26, 30) some of which demonstrate the know-how involved with working with slate. This street is in the suburb of Saint-Martin.



This garden, popular with locals, is part of the former grounds of the Marie Castle, a manor built in the 17th century by the Barons of Vitré (can be seen at place du Champ de Foire) to the detriment of the medieval castle. Repurchased and refurbished by the city at the end of the 19th century, today this ancient park is an enjoyable place to play or to walk, with romantic paths lined with exceptional trees such as Western Red Cedar from California.





## OUR MUST-SEE SPOTS AROUND VITRÉ

### THE SCULPTORS SOCIETY AT CHÂTEAUBOURG



the natural art

Contemporary art has been taking over the city for the past 20 years, and is constantly developing. Throughout the year, you will find sculptures installed in the city centre and in the park at the Ar Milin' hotel and restaurant on the banks of the Vilaine river. Leaving from the city hall, follow the first twelve steps of the educational sculpture trail.

Admire the monumental works by artists in different styles and from different worlds. The must-see part of the trail is undoubtedly the Ar Milin' park. It is free to enter and showcases a collection of sculptures that were acquired from the different editions of the annual sculptural monument event in the Jardin des arts.

- Ar Milin' Park, 30 rue de Paris City Hall, 5 place de l'Hôtel de ville
- Ar Milin Bistro - Restaurant, 30 rue de Paris Au Temps des Cerises, Delicatessen & Tea House, 9 rue de Paris Le bonheur est dans le Blé Crêperie, 18 rue du Maréchal Leclerc

### THE BOIS CORNILLÉ ESTATE IN VAL D'IZÉ



The Bois Cornillé Estate is like something out of Sleeping Beauty. Listed as a remarkable garden, it is typical of the grand parks of the Belle Époque (19th c.). Designed to enhance the walkway, for both walkers and those on horseback, the park is made up of centuries-old trees, pastures, ponds and different views, especially of the Neo-Gothic castle that is worthy of fairytales.

- Domaine du Bois Cornillé, 17 rue du château
- Auberge des Lys, 10 rue de l'église (on weekday)

## THE ROCHERS-SÉVIGNÉ CASTLE IN VITRÉ



You will have to leave the town to explore the Gothic manor of Madame Sévigé. Built in the 15th century, this country residence of the famous letter-writer under the reign of King Louis XIV is full of curiosities and is surrounded by a French-style park and garden, based on the design by André Le Nôtre, the principal gardener at Versailles.

The museum occupying part of this private residence is open between April to September. You can also explore the octagonal chapel built by the writer, the exhibition on show in the orangery, take a tour of the museum, or explore the park and garden with the walks named by Madame Sévigé. Only guided tours are available. Also on site is an 18-hole golf course.

- Les Rochers (7km from Vitré, follow the route of Argentré-du-Plessis).
- Enjoy the delightful setting of the Rochers estate over a drink in the golf clubhouse, situated in the former stables of the castle.

### GEOCACHING: AN HIGH-TECH TREASURE HUNT



This is a good excuse to head off and explore the cultural heritage of the area in a whole new way. The object of the game is simple: You have a trail to follow, riddles to solve and treasure to find...ideal for families but fun for everyone! To play, download the free app Trésors de Haute Bretagne (ADT35) and choose from a dozen different treasure troves in the Vitré region based on various themes: sport, nature, history and heritage, traditions, and arts etc. There is something for everyone!

- Bais, Châteaubourg, Erbrée, La Guerche-de-Bretagne, Rannée, Saint-M'Hervé, Torcé et Vitré.

Need help? Visit the Vitré Tourist Office or the Tourist Information Point in La Guerche-de-Bretagne.



### LA GUERCHE-DE-BRETAGNE A SMALL CITY OF CHARACTER

In its privileged location between Brittany and Anjou, the fortified city of la Guerche-de-Bretagne has been a thriving town for traders and artisans since the Middle-Ages, thanks to agriculture, trade, leather tanning and the fabric industry. The half-timbered houses with porches in the old-town continue to reflect this today. Every Tuesday morning, a big market also takes place, and has done since 1121! It is one of Brittany's biggest and most picturesque markets, where you can find everything from food and books, to clothing etc.

La Guerche-de-Bretagne, is also a city of gastronomy where the art of fine-dining is taught! Its widely renowned Hospitality College offers training in all the careers in the hotel and restaurant trade. Budding chefs regularly get to learn from the best, including the celebrity chef from the Michelin-starred Arpège restaurant, Alain PASSARD, who was born in the area.



Whether browsing the stalls or strolling through the streets, take the time to ramble and you will likely take the delightful path to place De Gaulle, the heart of the city, dominated by the ancient halls and imposing Notre-Dame basilica. This grand urban Marches of Brittany church has been a collegiate church since 1206, and is surrounded by magnificent floral and medieval gardens.

To learn more about the heritage of this city, choose either:

- a guided tour from the Guerche regional cultural and event association, Association Animations et Culture en Pays Guerchais
- A free self-guided walk: download the map from the town hall website or pick one up from the Tourist Information Office.
- A self-guided audio tour of the basilica with the free Izi Travel app.
- A treasure hunt with the free Trésors de Haute Bretagne app.

- Notre-Dame Basilica, place De Gaulle Hospitality College, 1 rue du Huit Mai
- Treat yourself at the training restaurant of the Hospitality College! Opens at noon during the academic year (lyceehotelier.com).

## THE PEACEFUL VILLAGE OF CHAMPEAUX



Imagine a small and quiet village, a stones throw from the Cantache lake, at the heart of a vale carved out over time. Add in a church that is modest in size with intricate Renaissance decoration, which borders a cloister that now acts as the central square, with its ancient well in the middle...

This describes the charm of this village with its protected historic monuments, and an ambience that is marked with as much romanticism as opulence. This is down to its origins in the Middle-Ages, when it developed around a leper colony (a place to care for lepers) with its Sainte-Magdeleine chapel and Saint-Pierre church, as an independent parish. The two religious buildings fell into ruin and the Espinay family replaced them in the 15th century by a collegiate church with a cloister and the Saint-Job and Saint-Abraham chapels. Take the time for a break in nature, or a stroll at your own pace, and enjoy some food or refreshments with a view of the ancient cloister.



The Espinay family, close to the ducal family and then royal, inherited the Rivière Castle in the 14th century, located not far from the centre of the village. This castle became their main residence and took their name as Espinay Castle. It was redesigned and extended during the Renaissance, preserving many decorative elements in-keeping with the period. Today it is listed as a Historic Monument and it takes bookings for visits from mid-June to mid-August.

- Collegiate Church, 11 rue du cloître Espinay castle, rue du château
- La Cascade Bar-restaurant, 2 place de la collégiale



### THE HAUTE-VILAINE ACTIVITY CENTRE IN SAINT-M'HERVÉ

Do you want to get some air in your lungs? Head 10 mins out of Vitré to the Haute-Vilaine Lake. This spot, located in excellent surroundings, offers a lovely view of the Nétumières Castle (15th century). The lake, filled in 1982, is one of three dams in the region that were built to protect Rennes from winter flooding. It also guarantees a back-up supply of drinking water for the Rennes and Vitré reservoirs. From the observatory (in Bourgon) you can admire the numerous species of birds that call it home throughout the year, and you can discover the distinctive flora and fauna on nature walks.

The lake also offers a wide variety of activities, including watersports with areas for stand-up paddleboarding, step paddleboarding, giant paddleboarding, pedalos, windsurfing, catamarans, and dragon boating. Land activities on offer include 7-14km walks around the banks, mountain biking, geocaching or modern treasure hunting with the Trésors de Haute Bretagne app (hide by jumping in the water!), orienteering, outdoor gym equipment and a playground for children over 6 years. In summer, there is a beach area with lifeguards on duty on the Chapelle-Erbrée side of the lake.

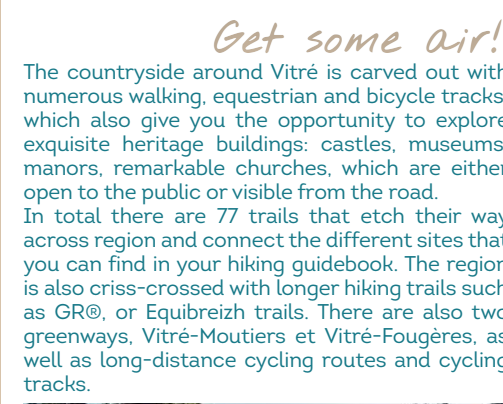
- La Ville Cuite, Saint-M'Hervé
- Bring your picnic: There are picnic tables available in the shade. A food truck offers some light snacks during high season.

### THE MINIATURE MONUMENTS OF DOMAGNÉ



When you are here, there's no need to eat cake like Alice in Wonderland to feel like a giant towering over the world around you. Come and get a bird-eye view of the Ar Men lighthouse, Mont-Saint-Michel, the Brittany House of Parliament and other famous monuments, thanks to local artist Henri Chesnais who created these miniature stone sculptures at a scale of 1/40th or 1/50th. You can also listen to an audio and french description using podcasts available on soundcloud.com. Positioned along a marked pathway, they create an enjoyable trail that is open all year round. Nearby, the Parc du Poirier offers a playground, a boules court, and an artificial lake.

- Promenade Chesnais, entry via rue Saint-Pierre and rue Saint-André
- Le Reason et Le Ricordeau restaurants, 1 rue Louis Reason and 1 rue Saint-Pierre
- Picnic tables and benches



### Get some air!

The countryside around Vitré is carved out with numerous walking, equestrian and bicycle tracks, which also give you the opportunity to explore exquisite heritage buildings: castles, museums, manors, remarkable churches, which are either open to the public or visible from the road. In total there are 77 trails that etch their way across region and connect the different sites that you can find in your hiking guidebook. The region is also criss-crossed with longer hiking trails such as GR®, or Equibreizh trails. There are also two greenways, Vitré-Moutiers et Vitré-Fougères, as well as long-distance cycling routes and cycling tracks.



### Breathe deeply in protected vulnerable natural areas :

- The trail from Mirligousse to Châtillon-en-Vendelais passes alongside part of the lake, a major ornithology reserve. Parking at the start: Camping/15.5km
- The educational trail in the Corbière forest, (signposted with ladybirds) offers a rich mosaic of the environment. Parking at the start: in Marpiré, follow the signs for "Forêt de Corbière" from Saint-Jean-sur-Vilaine/3.5 km.

### Feel the wind in your hair on the greenways

Two routes allow you to criss-cross the region:

- To the North, the Vitré-Fougères greenway starting from a Cantache. Parking on Route de Gérard/26km.
- To the South, the Vitré-Moutiers greenway, departing from Chemin du Pavillon.

- Find a leaflet dedicated to the greenways as well as a hiking guide of the territory (on foot, horse and mountain bike - 5€) at the Tourist Office in Vitré. The sheets can be downloaded from vitrecommunaute.org.
- The Châtillon-en-Vendelais lake area and the Corbière Forest are managed by the Department of Ille-et-Vilaine: ille-et-vilaine.fr

Other remarkable buildings that you can visit: Notre-Dame de la Peinière Chapel in Saint-Didier (la Peinière), Saint-Patern church in Louvigné-de-Bais, Saint-Melaine de Domalain church and Saint-Sulpice church in Gennes-sur-Seiche, Saint-Marcel church in Bais, the Indo-Chinese pagoda in La Selle-Guerchaise, and the church of Saint-Pierre in Châteaubourg.