



**Le Parc**  
naturel régional  
du Marais poitevin



# The Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park

Inspirations across the river...

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My roadbook

A new life starts right here



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# Editorial

As a natural space where nature meets mankind, the Marais poitevin is home of many secrets. Who can guess the multiplicity of its landscapes, besides the Green Venice? The size of the Regional Natural Park? Who knows that its environment and heritage are thus preserved?

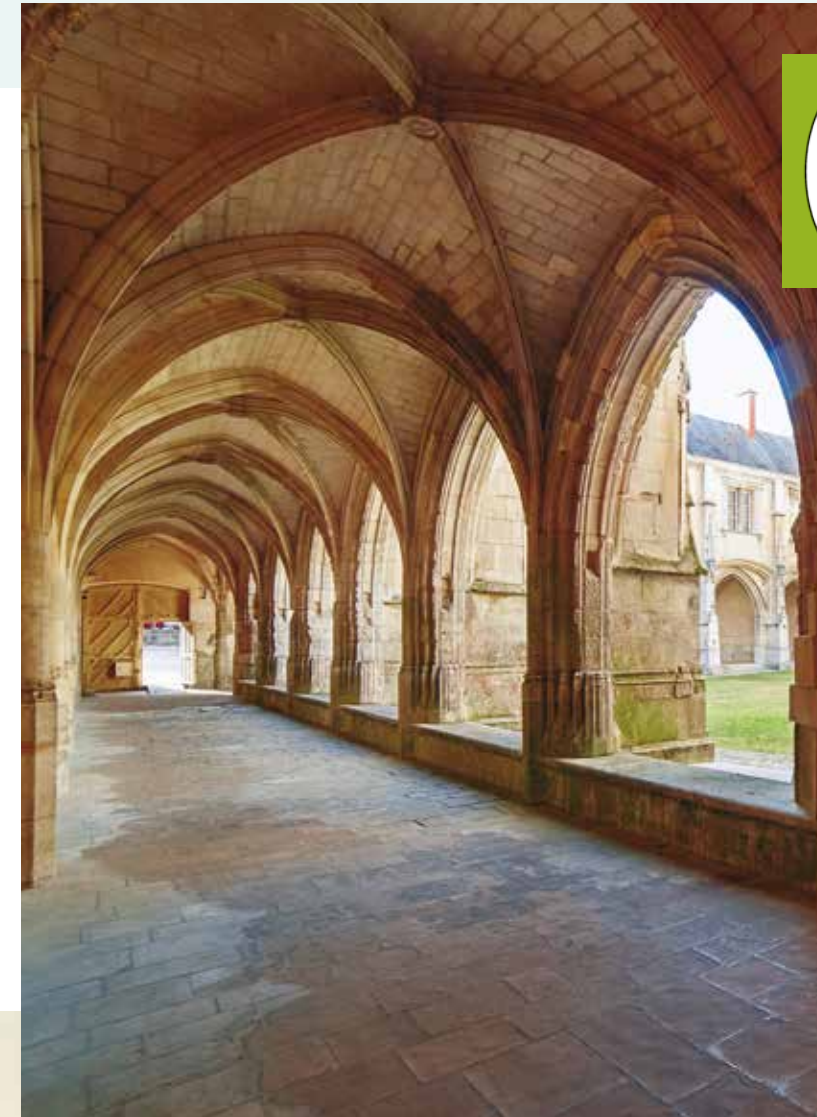
Visiting this territory becomes a unique experience. Whether you start an adventure on the roads and pathways of the coastline, cross the dry marshes, walking down the towpaths or the alleys of the villages, or even canoe on a small canal, you will discover many different environments and unique landscapes with their own fauna and flora.

When you travel to the marsh, you also meet the authenticity of a territory, its inhabitants, and most importantly those who are committing to welcome all onlookers in this extravagant nature.

Enjoy the mysteries of a journey to an unforgettable experience. 🗨️

**Pierre-Guy Perrier,**

President of the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park  
Vice-President of the Pays de la Loire Regional Council



Valeurs Parc naturel régional  
**LOOK OUT  
FOR THE  
RIGHT PLACES!**

The "Valeurs Parc naturel régional" locates the hosts, visitation sites, boatmen, guides for bicycle rides, producers and artisans that are committed to respect the values of the Natural Park. They all work for sustainable development and welcome you at any time...



Looking for activities, artisans, sites or hosts with the label "Valeurs Parc naturel régional"? Then, flash this code with your smartphone.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION...

About our actions

[pnr.parc-marais-poitevin.fr](http://pnr.parc-marais-poitevin.fr)

About our trips

[www.parc-marais-poitevin.fr/en](http://www.parc-marais-poitevin.fr/en)

## Discovering a Regional Natural Park...

In France, the Regional Natural Parks are the symbols of noteworthy, emblematic, populated and fragile spaces. They are places where villages and cities team-up for a project to preserve and enhance nature and, thus, allow a good quality of life. It is the very heart of the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park's mission.

# Three landscapes for one unique Marais poitevin

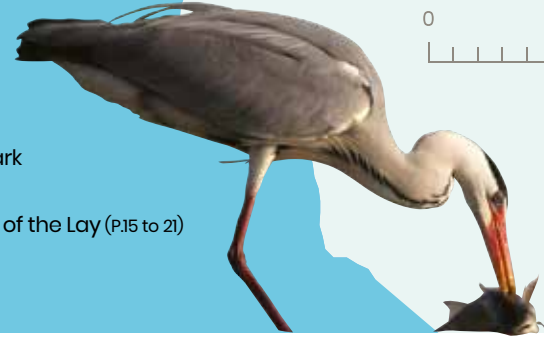
I was recently intrigued by a friend of mine who asserted that the Aiguillon Bay was part of the Marais poitevin. As a lover of nature and Atlantic coastlines, I wanted to learn more about it... So, I decided to go to that ideal natural place. But where to start this adventure? Should I choose the beaches, the Green Venice, or even the cities? I opted for an initiatory journey that would allow me to stroll along the water and learn how this unique territory has been designed over the centuries...



- Largest wet area on the Atlantic coast
- 8,200 kilometres of waterways
- 330 bird species  
750 plant species
- 22 common marshes for a total area of 2,100 ha
- 1,000 kilometres of dams
- 594 hydraulic structures

**3 LABELS:**  
 Marais poitevin regional natural park, "Grand Site de France", European Destination of Excellence.

**Smooth great escapes**  
 Wanderings by bike to reach the coast and its numerous aspects. Walks in the typical alleys or on the towpaths. Boat rides by punt, canoe or even paddle to explore the mysteries of the Green Venice. Baudet du Poitou donkey rides to discover at your pace the riches of this territory, as fragile as it is unique... Everything pushes the traveller to let the turmoil behind him and get into calm activities that respect the environment.



Find all the new trips recommended by the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park on [baludik.fr](http://baludik.fr)



Here, some treasure hunts... Register on [www.terra-aventura.fr](http://www.terra-aventura.fr)

## The coastline

# Between ocean and fresh water..

The Aiguillon bay is a magic place, rocked by the seasons, that already offers me different sights depending on the hours of the day.

The atmospheres and the lights change with the tides.

At high tide, the waves lick the seafront dam that protects the inhabitants.  
At low tide, you can discover vast extents. That is when birds come to get food.  
A wonderful time to observe them easily, even the rarest...



### WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Let's cycle...

La Vélo Francette®, a long-distance cycling route stretching from Normandy to the Atlantic coast, through the Marais poitevin, from Niort to La Rochelle.

La Vélodyssée, a long-distance cycling route stretching from Norway to Portugal, offers you another perspective on 85 kilometres of trails from Longeville-sur-Mer to La Rochelle.



### OUR FAVOURITE!

Cycling with your family, in the heart of the marshes, in an environment between land and sea.



### LET'S TASTE...

#### Shellfish and crustaceans!

Between the sky and the sea, at low tide, discover the beach fishery... while respecting the rules. A naturalist guide, who is also a fishing instructor, will show you how to fish on the best spots.

Cap Pêche et nature ☎ +33 (0)6 75 85 56 43  
www.cap-peche-et-nature.fr

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

#### Enjoy the waves and the wind.

From La Tranche-sur-Mer to L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer, through La Faute or Longeville-sur-Mer, a beautiful place for activities like surfing, kite surfing, wake boarding, knee boarding and sailing is waiting for you...

#### Kayak, canoe, stand-up paddle...

Travel along the coastlines in complete peace. And on the long sandy beaches, more fun activities are waiting for you.

#### Fish in a plaice in Esnandes!

When you arrive, the water seems so far. Just a moment to settle down – and here comes the ocean. On the menu tonight: small soles, mullets, basses and shrimps... that grow in the mudflats.

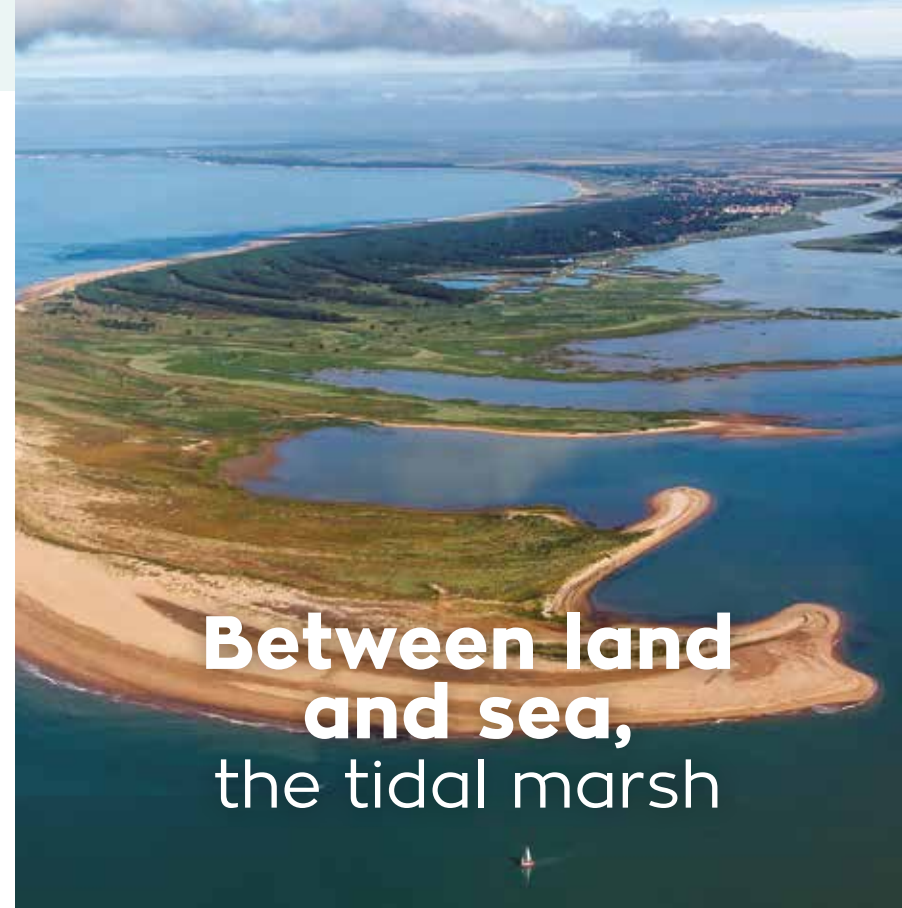
Reserve with the association Esnandis – "Maison de la baie du Marais Poitevin" ☎ +33 (0)5 46 01 34 64  
maison-baie-maraispoitevin.fr



### OUR FAVOURITE!

The "Rade d'Amour", located on the edge of the Arçay Cape in La Faute-sur-Mer, is a site of the "Conservatoire du littoral" (coastal protection agency). Its observatory, open all year long, allows you to admire the black-winged stilt or the Common shelduck.

For a guided tour (in Summer), please contact the Sud Vendée Littoral tourist office.  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 37 37



## Between land and sea, the tidal marsh

Let's leave the beaches to reach the Aiguillon Bay, one of the most prestigious ecological units in France. At low tide, you can discover the mudflats, rich in phytoplankton, which is the food base of shellfish and crustaceans, the latter being the food base of birds and fish.

The highest tides cover its salty meadows – or "mizottes" as we call them here – colonised by an exceptional flora. Dams separate them from the agricultural polders.



### WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

#### Strolling at the Aiguillon-sur-Mer harbour.

A small, picturesque harbour with its wooden stilts. At low tide, a walk along the dam at the cape offers you a beautiful vantage point on the mudflats and the birds.

#### Taking your time at the Arçay Cape...

This 6-kilometre-long peninsula is building up in rhythm with the tides, bringing each time new sediments. This place is shared with mudflats, salty meadows, dunes and forests. It is a true open-sky paradise where biodiversity reigns supreme.

Free guided tours in July and August. Sud Vendée Littoral Tourist Office ☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 37 37

#### Having a breath of fresh air at the Saint-Clément Cape!

On this place, a magnificent panorama of the Aiguillon Bay is waiting for you. A promontory with an orientation table shows you the places surrounding you: the Ré Island, Aiguillon-sur-Mer, Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm...

GPS coordinates: 46°18'15.70"N / 1°12'24.48"O



### WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

#### Visit the Saint-Martin Church in Esnandes.

Fortified between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it reveals a breath-taking view on the Aiguillon Bay. Take this opportunity to visit the "Maison de la Baie" or House of the Bay (see p. 12).



Meet Thierry, "ceramist of the sea", who uses natural elements like the powder of oyster, mussel shells, or even seaweeds and other local natural plants for the process of enamelling.

Céramiste de la mer,  
1, rue Saturne in Villedoux  
☎ +33 (0)6 17 64 75 83

## On the beaches, shellfish and crustaceans



Wooded dunes, kilometres of white sand... the coastline of the Vendée and Charente-Maritime departments is one of the most well-known and busiest, with its largest beaches and its sunshine. A coastline that impresses, a place to relax and contemplate this exceptional nature, or to get active!



### THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!

The Life Nature program, conducted by the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park, aims to restore the natural environments on the Aiguillon Bay. It works on the installation of small wooden barriers to limit the flow of walkers and avoid trampling. Vegetation can thus develop on the dunes, a natural environment protected on a European level.





# The Aiguillon Bay, France's largest mussel growing area

Cockles, clams, scallops, oysters... The Aiguillon Bay is a hot spot for shellfish farming. Its famous product: the "Charron", a mussel that can be picked on an oak pole called "bouchot" in a shallow water. Its taste qualities are known worldwide, because this mussel enjoys a lot of sunshine at low tide and nutrients at high tide!

## 📍 WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

**To Charron!** Located at the mouth of the Sèvre niortaise River, its harbour offers in the heart of an unspoilt nature extraordinary landscapes, sometimes marshes, sometimes rivers, other times the sea... Charron's activity is connected to the tides. The Pavé harbour, which offers a panorama of the Aiguillon Bay, is the dispatch centre of the "bouchot" mussel. Shellfish farmers come and unload their production and undertake maintenance on their vessels.



## 🍴 LET'S TASTE...

**The mussel of Charron** at the La Ponetière restaurant. On the water's edge with a view on the mouth of the Sèvre niortaise River, this riverside cafe welcomes you from May to September.

Port du Corps de garde in Charron  
☎ +33 (0)6 83 50 24 42



## 📋 WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

**Go to sea with the "boucholeurs"!**

Go on a shellfish farming boat from the 1950s and discover the shellfish farms. A unique moment to appreciate the Bay and its fauna, while taking advantage of the old sea-dogs' competent advices!

Association du Vieux Tape-cul  
☎ +33 (0)6 72 83 00 50 - [www.leboucholeur.com](http://www.leboucholeur.com)

**Visit the House of the Bay of the Marais poitevin.** You will learn more about mussel farming in the Bay! After a short movie and the tidal marshes' ecosystem, enjoy the museographic space, a playful and interactive place for everyone.

Parvis de l'église in Esnandes ☎ +33 (0)5 46 01 34 64  
[maison-baiemaraispoitevin.fr](http://maison-baiemaraispoitevin.fr)

## 🔔 DON'T MISS IT!

**Let's party at the Moul'stock festival**, a rock festival in June, where you can taste mussels and French fries!

[moulstock.fr](http://moulstock.fr)

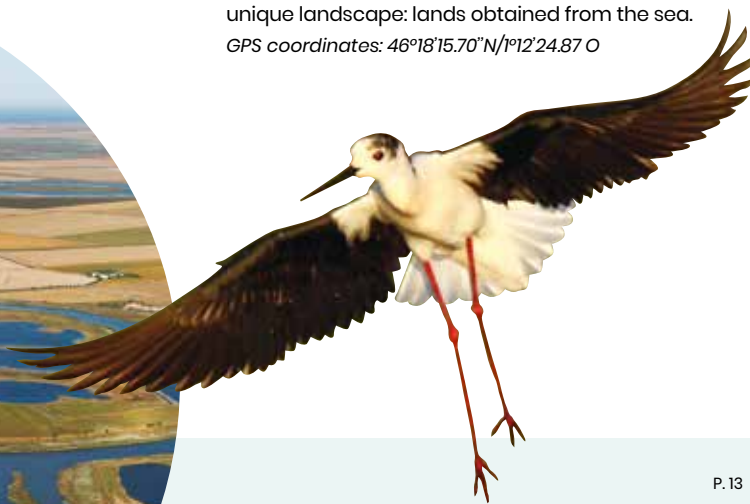


Guided bike ride with a visit to local producers and product tasting (oysters, wine...)

Original Vélo Tour  
3 rue du Gros Noyer in Maillé  
☎ +33 (0)6 67 96 97 88  
[originalvelotour.fr](http://originalvelotour.fr)



Caspian tern, avocet, common shelduck... The Bay is one of the most important places in France in terms of habitat for birds. Wintering birds come and settle after spending the summer in cold lands. The migratory birds that leave in winter Northern Europe to the South – Spain, Africa – stop over. Mudflats and salty meadows are a great choice for settlement!



## 📍 WHERE SHOULD WE GO? Observing birds

**The National Nature Reserve of "La Casse de la Belle Henriette", in La Faute-sur-Mer.**



This lagoon is of significant interest for the reproduction of waterbirds.

GPS coordinates: 46°20'23.5"N/1°20'24.00"O

**The "Grouin du cou" Cape in La Tranche-sur-Mer.**

This rocky plateau offers food resource for ruddy turnstones, little egrets, common ringed plovers, seagulls, Brent geese...

GPS coordinates: 46°20'37.24 N/1°27'44.5"O

**The LPO Sud Vendée association (Bird Protection League)** gives you the possibility to count with them birds at the Aiguillon Cape.

Le Grand Mothais in Champagné-les-Marais  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 78 80 - [vendee.lpo.fr](http://vendee.lpo.fr)



**Being overwhelmed at the Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm observation platform.** Ocean, "mizottes" meadows, mudflats, marshes and canals are the elements of a natural and historically unique landscape: lands obtained from the sea.

GPS coordinates: 46°18'15.70"N/1°12'24.87"O

## The dry marshes and the valley of the Lay

# Discovering infinite spaces

As I leave the ocean, passing by the mudflats,  
I arrive in the heart of the dry marshes. A new landscape appears in front of me.  
As the light turns gold, its landscapes captivate you.  
Large stretches of greenway are dominated by former limestone islands.  
Reed beds, large meadows, the Lay river and canals welcome harriers, sparrows,  
reed warblers and frogs...



“ I have always been looking for the lights of the Marais poitevin, more than its sites. I like to photograph the dry marshes in stormy weather in order to capture metallic skies. I also like to enjoy the sunrise to transmit the atmosphere of those large stretches of land. Each season brings its lights: at the beginning of spring, when the grass is lush and the cattle are brought to the meadows, or in winter with the morning frost, the fog and a flood, we have all the elements for a perfect picture. It is also in winter, during sunrise, that I prefer to take pictures of the dunes, to get clear sand and a blue sky. I would like my pictures to encourage people to stop and admire this landscape they use to pass by. ”

Pascal Baudry, photograph



**WHERE SHOULD WE GO?**

**By bike...**

A nice and sunny bike path – Vélodyssée path – brings you to Marans, through Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm, where you will be able to discover the remains of the Royal Abbey and thirteen centuries of history.





## Mosaic of crops and meadows



Located between the ocean and the wet marshes, the dry marshes stand before you with its large open landscapes filled with wet meadows, reed beds or cultivated lands.

Along the ditches and straight canals that surround the natural meadows and cereal crops, bushes of tamarisks and thorny trees disrupt the horizontality of those landscapes. Trees are rare over here... but the fauna and the flora are particularly rich. Emerging from infinity, limestone islands are high points where villages settled.

### 📍 WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

#### To Chaillé-les-Marais.

Perched on a limestone cliff, this village offers a stunning view on the dry marshes.

### ✅ WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

As true havens of peace, the reserves offer perfect conditions to observe birds, amphibians... without disturbing them.

#### National Nature Reserve Michel Brosselein

2 rue du 8 mai in Saint-Denis-du-Payré  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 28 41 18  
[en.reservenaturelle-saintdenisdupayre.fr](http://en.reservenaturelle-saintdenisdupayre.fr)



#### Regional Natural Reserve of the Marshes of La Vacherie

Ferme du Grand Mothais in Champagné-les-Marais  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 78 80  
[reservenaturelle-vacherie.jpq.fr](http://reservenaturelle-vacherie.jpq.fr)



#### Departmental Biological Reserve of Nalliers-Mouzeuil

La Maison de la Réserve - Les Huttes in Nalliers  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 97 69 80  
[www.sitesnaturels.vendee.fr/reservenalliers.html](http://www.sitesnaturels.vendee.fr/reservenalliers.html)



### 📣 DON'T MISS IT!

#### The "fête de la Bouse" (Dung Party) in Triaize.

A big, unusual celebration of rural life around the end of July. An opportunity to discover ancient professions, harvests done back in those days and the production of dungs, which were then necessary for heating and grills!

### 🍴 LET'S TASTE...



#### Honey and its products (candies, nougat...)

Honey House of Les Fontenelles et les Butinades  
Les Fontenelles in Triaize  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 93 34  
[www.miellerie-des-fontenelles.com](http://www.miellerie-des-fontenelles.com)

## Following in the footsteps of the monk builders



Since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, monks combined their efforts to master the hostility of swamps, thus creating the dry marshes. They dug the first canals, installed dams to protect from the ocean and the tides, and to work those rich lands. Today, the Abbeys of the Marais poitevin offer thanks to their remains a unique testimony of this period...



### Maillezais

This powerful fortress was once an abbatial church whose building started in 1005. It shined for centuries, both religiously – it became a cathedral in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – and economically, but also culturally. Rabelais, who was a monk back then, came there to study for five years. Its remains, mixing Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance styles, illustrate the art of stone masons, but are also a testimony of the cruelty of religious wars.

Saint-Pierre Abbey in Maillezais

☎ +33 (0)2 51 87 66 80  
[www.sitesculturels.vendee.fr/Abbaye-de-Maillezais](http://www.sitesculturels.vendee.fr/Abbaye-de-Maillezais)

### Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm

The history of the Royal Abbey of Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm is closely tied with the land reclamation works but also considerably eventful. Viking invasions, destructions, reconstructions... The Abbey built in 682 by the monks of Noirmoutier on this limestone island in the Gulf of the Pictes has become a Royal Abbey in 1516. Among the high dignitaries in charge of the Abbey, we can name Cardinal Mazarin. Today it is a private property where you can admire the capitular hall, the refectory or the monks' pavilion.

Abbaye royale - 1 place de l'Abbaye in Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 30 21 89  
[www.sudvendee littoral.co.uk/your-visit/our-ticket-sales/royal-abbey/](http://www.sudvendee littoral.co.uk/your-visit/our-ticket-sales/royal-abbey/)



### Nieul-sur-l'Autise

Sculpted Romanesque façade, inclined pillars, cloister with four galleries surrounding a small garden... This masterpiece of the Romanesque architecture preserved its charm over centuries. The Saint-Vincent Royal Abbey, whose prosperity was the result of Eleanor of Aquitaine's protection, is a complete monastic complex with a church, a cloister and monastic buildings.

Saint-Vincent Abbey - 1 allée du Cloître in Rives d'Autise  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 53 66 66  
[sitesculturels.vendee.fr/Abbaye-de-Nieul-s-l-Autise](http://sitesculturels.vendee.fr/Abbaye-de-Nieul-s-l-Autise)



### THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!

The Montagu's harrier nests in wheat fields. Protected by the Park, the environmental protection associations and the farmers, this bird is carefully monitored in order to prevent the destruction of nests at harvest.



Here, cities are surprising you...

**Luçon, famous bishopric**

*It is on foot that you can discover this former harbour linked to the Aiguillon Bay by a canal. As the spiritual capital city of South Vendée, Luçon has an abundant religious heritage. One of its most famous representatives was Cardinal Richelieu. It is a small town with liveable streets, an interesting step when you visit the strongholds of Vendée.*

**WHERE SHOULD WE GO?**

**To the Dumaine Garden**, a charming garden with a 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic atmosphere.

**Admire the Gothic-style Our-Lady cathedral**, with Romanesque and Classic parts.

**Marans, vibrant heart of the Marsh**

Marans is a charming small urban site, crossed by the Sèvre niortaise river and with an historic character. The maritime harbour, basins, docks and Baltard-style halls are indicative of the former strong commercial activity. Don't leave the city centre without seeing the Notre-Dame church's unique glass bell tower with an aluminium frame. When it was first built, there was not enough money to build the bell tower. It was corrected in 1988 by the native from Marans Barthélémy Fabbro, who was sad to see his church "naked".



**WHERE SHOULD WE GO?**

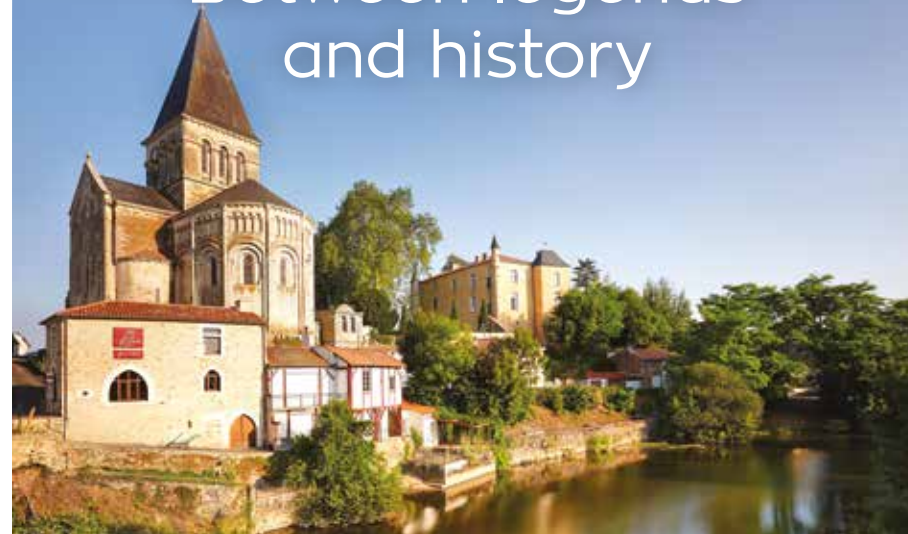
**To Marans' marina!**

**LET'S TASTE...**

**Eggs!**

The city is well known for its "Marans" chicken, an ancient specie which lay big, dark, brown-shelled eggs. It became known worldwide because of James Bond who, in "From Russia with Love", brag about eating one egg of a "Marans" chicken in a Chinese-porcelain egg cup every morning!

**The villages of the Valley of the Lay: Between legends and history**



Staying in the heart of the Marais poitevin is like getting thousands of stories to tell when you return... Which is so true if you know how to unlock the mysteries of its villages!

**WHERE SHOULD WE GO?**

**Discover the legends of Saint-Benoist-sur-Mer.**

This old small harbour of the Gulf of the Pictes has become a village of the dry marshes, known for its plaster rabbit smoking a pipe. It is said that it had been placed on the roof of the church in memory of a tobacco-lover priest, while consumption was then forbidden by the bishopric. Others affirm that it has been erected in memory of a "womanizer" artisan, during the renovation of the church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Cross the Lay River in Lavaud.**

Between Péault and La Couture, you will cross one of the 16 bridges built by Gustave Eiffel and still operating nowadays.

**Admire the Morigq Tower.**

Located in Angles, this tower is said to have been erected on the Romanesque foundations of a 11<sup>th</sup> century castle's ancient dungeon, that has remained in ruins ever since. The Mayor of La Rochelle bought the ruins in 1430 in order to build the Morigq Tower, whose use was to monitor vessel traffic. After the draining of marshes, the tower became a prison, then a wheat granary.

**WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

**Fish along the Lay River.**

The village of La Bretonnière-la-Claye offers a pontoon available for everyone and a boat ramp. Just around the corner, the old iron winch was used to regulate the water levels in the marsh of La Claye.

**Hike in Mareuil-sur-Lay-Dissais (12,5 km).**

Following the Marmande path and the yellow marking at the start of the hike on the Lay parking spot, you will enjoy a beautiful sight of the Lay riversides and get to the village through the vines. (Left picture)

*Sud Vendée Littoral Tourist Office*

+33 (0)2 51 56 37 37

**The wines of the Lay Valley.** The mild weather added to the geological richness offers a typicality to those places of Vendée, made of several terroirs such as Mareuil and Vix, both located in the heart of the Marais poitevin.

*35-kilometre wine tourism circuit*

**LET'S TASTE...**

**Stop at the "Les Arts par nature" Festival at the priory of la Chaume, while tasting the domain's organic wines!**

*35 chemin de la Chaume in Vix*

+33 (0)2 51 00 49 38 - [www.prieure-la-chaume.com](http://www.prieure-la-chaume.com)



**The "préfou",** a specialty of Vendée served during the aperitif, is a flat bread filled with butter and garlic in generous proportions.

**THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!**

The Park supports the "Conservatoire des ressources génétiques" (Conservatory for genetic resources) to preserve and enhance local species: Marans chicken, Poitou donkey, Marais poitevin grey goose, angelica and fruit varieties...



## Tales of water

As the largest wet area of the Atlantic coastline, this ancient marine gulf has been progressively redesigned thanks to the combined efforts of natural evolution process and human reclamation. To manage water, omnipresent on the territory, a brilliant hydraulic system has been installed. The dry marshes, surrounded by dams, are protected from ocean waters and tides coming from “high lands”. The wet marshes, which represent the flood-risk areas, contain a complex and dense network of waterways.

### LET'S TASTE...

**The local gastronomy on the water's edge** at the auberge de la Rivière, a true gourmet getaway.  
2 rue du Port de la Fouarne in Velluire-sur-Vendée  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 52 32 15  
[www.hotel-riviere-vendee.com](http://www.hotel-riviere-vendee.com)



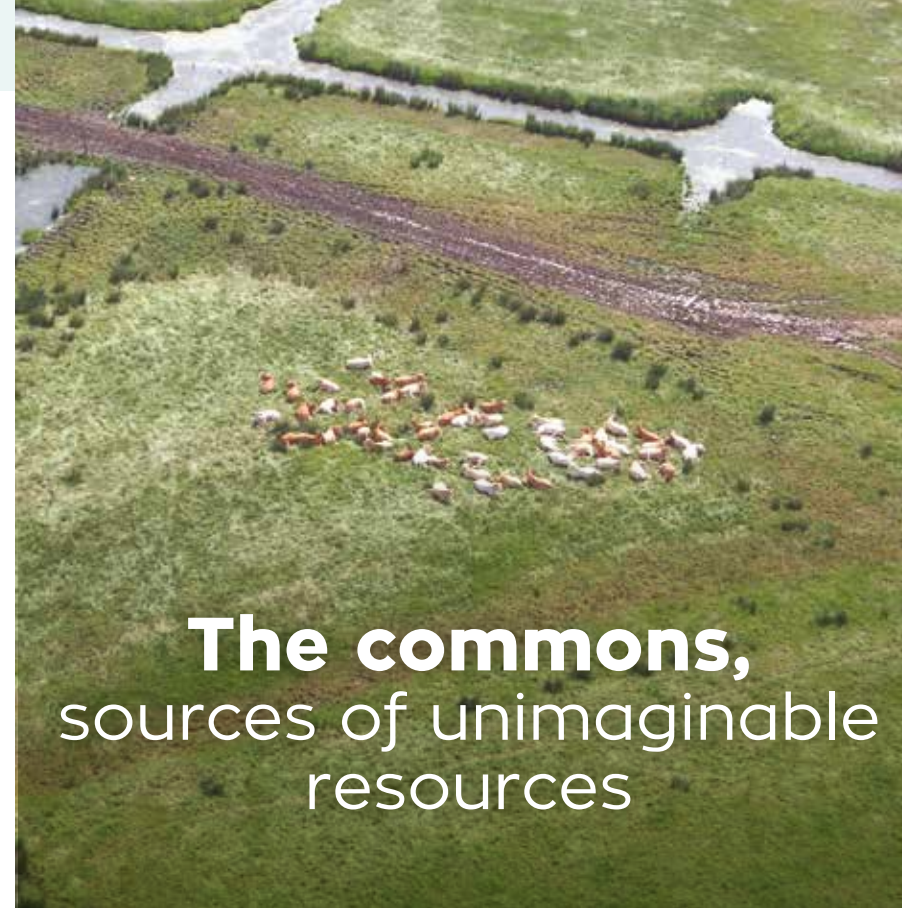
### OUR FAVOURITE!



At the “Maison du Maître de digues” (House of the Master of the Dykes), a traditional “hut” where you can discover this territory’s culture and traditions,

you also learn how the dykes, canals and other hydraulic structures work! The hosts will explain to you the “portes à flots”, an ingenious system that prevents the upwelling of salt water in the marsh’s rivers and canals. Those doors that close thanks to the flow of high tide are always connected with a dam in order to control the quantity of water evacuated at low tide.

7, rue de la Coupe du Rocher in Chaillé-les-Marais ☎ +33 (0)2 51 56 77 30  
<https://www.maisondumaitrededigues.fr/visiter/im-english-spoken/>



## The commons, sources of unimaginable resources

What a beautiful transition with the Green Venice! You are now facing a large grassy meadow without any tree or fence, a “communal” or common. Those meadows, property of the communes, are available to farmers and can be as large as 300 hectares. They come from the works done in the marshes ten centuries ago and have never been modified ever since. They support a remarkable biodiversity... This larder benefits cows and horses that graze here. Migratory birds come to eat and breed, others come to rest when there is high tide in the Aiguillon Bay. There are 22 commons left in the Marais poitevin.



### THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!

During the grazing of livestock or when the animals leave, a corral is required to carefully operate the sorting of animals. The Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park is funding that equipment and supporting the farmers in the preservation of natural wet meadows.

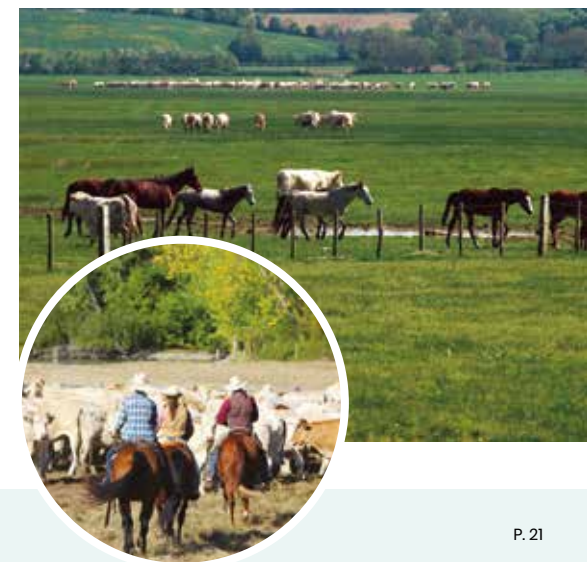


The circuit of the dyke interpretation trail – a 6-kilometre long loop – borders the common marsh while offering a noticeably clear view of the marsh, with information plates, an orientation table... An ideal way to admire the marsh, its fauna and flora, to understand how it works, its water management... before reaching the Grenouillère site.

Daniel Neau, Mayor of Saint-Benoist-sur-Mer

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

**Celebrate the opening of common meadows in April.** Some cities that are extremely attached to their meadows and the activities linked to those lands, celebrate the opening of their common meadow to the animals on sunny days. A celebration where you can meet inhabitants and farmers and have a taste of festivities in marshlands.



## The Green Venice

# The Green Venice, a delicate combination of water and plants.

From the dry marshes to the Green Venice, there is only one step. Here I am in the most emblematic part of the Marais poitevin called the "Green Venice" since last century because of the vegetable vault and the duckweeds that occasionally cover the waterways.

In this watery and sunny atmosphere, I observe a lush landscape where nature is extraordinarily rich.

Those formerly wild lands are criss-crossed with waterways that surround small plots bordered with pruned ash trees and poplars, where animals graze.

Other lands are used for logging or market gardening.

It is a true aquatic maze in front of you. You can access here and there thanks to boating slips and small harbours. All these together constitute a living picture-perfect setting...



“ The “Grand site de France” label honours the work done by decision-makers on unique territories. On this labelled part of the Marais poitevin, gentle tourism is favoured, and “negative points” are avoided, so that anybody can be driven, rocked, overwhelmed... by the site. It is also to ensure a proper maintenance of this unique “green infrastructure” in Europe: a double line up of pollard ash trees bordering canals, ditches and small waterways. Those 450,000 trees planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that suffer from dieback will be replanted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! ”

**Sylvain Provost**, Grand site de France” inspector at the “Direction régionale de l’Environnement, de l’Aménagement et du Logement en Nouvelle-Aquitaine” (Nouvelle-Aquitaine Environment, Development and Housing Regional Direction)



### “Grand Site de France” Label

In 2010 the “Grand Site de France” label has been awarded to the Regional Natural Park for the quality of the Green Venice landscapes and heritage, and their partners’ commitment to preserve and sustainably manage it.





# The Green Venice, a cathedral of greenery

As an emblematic landscape of the Marais poitevin, the Green Venice are still subject to floods. It is a unique landscape that is taking shape, with long lines of pollard ash trees planted along the waterways. Like a cathedral of greenery, they form at some places a real vegetable vault above the small canals, on which boats float quietly, rocked by the rhythm of the boatman's "pigouille", a long wooden pole used during transportation. To get to this incredible maze of waterways, embark at the renovated harbours in the heart of the villages with blond stones and orange-tone roof tiles.



## WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

### A boat or canoe ride.

Go and appreciate the mysteries of the marsh's water mazes freely with a map given at the jetty or with the guide's comments.



#### The Green Venice Pier

Le Port in Le Mazeau  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 52 90 73  
[www.la-venise-verte.com](http://www.la-venise-verte.com)

#### The Bazoin Locks Pier

Bazoin in La Ronde  
☎ +33 (0)5 46 56 41 28  
[www.polenature-maraispoitevin.fr/embarcadere-des-ecluses](http://www.polenature-maraispoitevin.fr/embarcadere-des-ecluses)

#### Ornithological Park Pier

Le Petit Buisson in Saint-Hilaire-la-Palud  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 26 04 09  
[www.oiseauxmaraispoitevin.com/marais-poitevin-sur-leau](http://www.oiseauxmaraispoitevin.com/marais-poitevin-sur-leau)

#### The Abbey Pier

Le Vieux Port in Maillezais  
☎ +33 (0)2 51 87 21 87  
[www.marais-poitevin-tourisme.com](http://www.marais-poitevin-tourisme.com)



### Let's go hiking...

If you enjoy walking or riding a bike, the marsh's specified trails are just for you. Beautiful, marked trails are calling for you to wander in this inspiring nature. Or do you prefer something more atypical? Then go riding a horse or a donkey: numerous structures will satisfy you. And if you are afraid of being too tired, don't forget that our trails are shady and flat!



## WHERE SHOULD WE GO?



To the "Maison du Marais poitevin" (House of the Marais poitevin), a key venue that gives you every detail about the Poitevin Marsh, from its history to the different means of transport.

5 place de la Coutume in Coulon  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 35 81 04 - [www.maison-marais-poitevin.fr](http://www.maison-marais-poitevin.fr)

### Let's go to the ornithological park!

"Les Oiseaux du Marais poitevin" - the Birds of the Marais poitevin - in the heart of the wild marsh, welcome more than 75 species in an 8-hectare park. Open from April to the end of October. Boat ride and restaurant services available.

Le Petit Buisson in Saint-Hilaire-la-Palud  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 26 04 09 - [www.oiseauxmaraispoitevin.com](http://www.oiseauxmaraispoitevin.com)

Let's do a natural break at "du Coq à l'Âne" in Saint-Georges-de-Rex, for an unforgettable adventure in discovering the local breeds of the Poitevin Marsh.

12 rue du Moulin in Saint-Georges-de-Rex  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 35 06 28 - [www.ducoqalane.fr](http://www.ducoqalane.fr)

Champagne soap works, soaps and cosmetics formulated with organic vegetable oils.

28 rue du Guerfou in Benet  
☎ +33 (0)6 27 33 37 49 - [lasavonneriechampagne.fr](http://lasavonneriechampagne.fr)

Poterie Belinda, ceramics, introductory workshops.

10 place du Tertre in La Garette  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 24 71 14 - [www.poteriebelinda.com](http://www.poteriebelinda.com)

## Do you speak the language of the marshes?

The "fossé", narrow and shallow, delimits the plots and forms natural fences.

The "conche" is a small canal that is preferred if you want to admire along the way the unique nature surrounding you.

The "rigole" is a straight-lined waterway that facilitates the water flow.

The "batai" or traditional boat of the marsh people, allows you to sneak on the small ditches or the shallowest places thanks to its flat and smooth bottom. At the back, on the finest part, stands the "pilot" who progresses thanks his "pigouille", a long wooden pole he pegs while sliding it at the side of the boat before pushing it.



## LET'S TASTE...

The "mojettes", big white beans with a fine layer, cultivated in the marshlands. They are served with ham from Vendée.

The eels, served grilled, fried or in a stew.



The beef meat labelled « Valeurs Parc naturel régional »

At the Central, 4 rue de l'Autremont in Coulon  
☎ +33 (0)5 49 35 90 20  
[hotel-lecentral-coulon.com](http://hotel-lecentral-coulon.com)



## THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!

The Park is responsible for maintaining the marking of 300 kilometres of waterways. It also restores the natural meadows and plants trees that will form tomorrow's pollard trees. **You too, participate in the safeguarding of this landscape!**  
[www.fondation-patrimoine.org/les-projets/les-arbres-tetards-du-marais-poitevin](http://www.fondation-patrimoine.org/les-projets/les-arbres-tetards-du-marais-poitevin).





# Warning: generous nature!

Enclosed landscapes bordered with trees, open landscapes, impenetrable woods, hillsides, bluffs... Even if we are talking about "Green Venice", it is still a variety of landscapes that we can see. And with those landscapes come their biodiversity. Soils saturated in water because of floods welcome trees, including the emblematic pollard ash tree or the alder that retains the riversides, while alkaline peaty soils, born from the accumulation of plants underwater, foster numerous plants. Along the waterways you can see forget-me-not, iris, valerian... A flora that seduces kingfishers, purple herons, otters, amphibians and dragonflies... If you want to observe this generous nature, just stop and take the trails or waterways to better admire it.




### Protected species

126 essential plant species are protected because this ecosystem is still fragile. That includes the snake's head, or leper lily, which grows in the wet meadows. Observe, take a picture... but do not bring home that nature!



The Green Venice contain a mosaic of habitats and landscapes, with a unique biodiversity that can be observed only by taking your time. Using soft travel modes is the only way to discover a purple heron looking for a fish, amphibians in ponds on the hillsides, the large copper, a metallic-orange butterfly, or even this beautiful blue beetle called the Rosalia longicorn, whose larvae hatch in July on the pollard ash trees' trunk.

**Odile Cardot**, biodiversity assessor at the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park

**THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!**

The inventories of the Marais poitevin Regional Natural Park allow the enhancement the richness of the natural heritage and enable actions to protect the most spectacular species. The otter, the eel and the Montagu's harrier are some of the beneficiaries of the Park's actions.

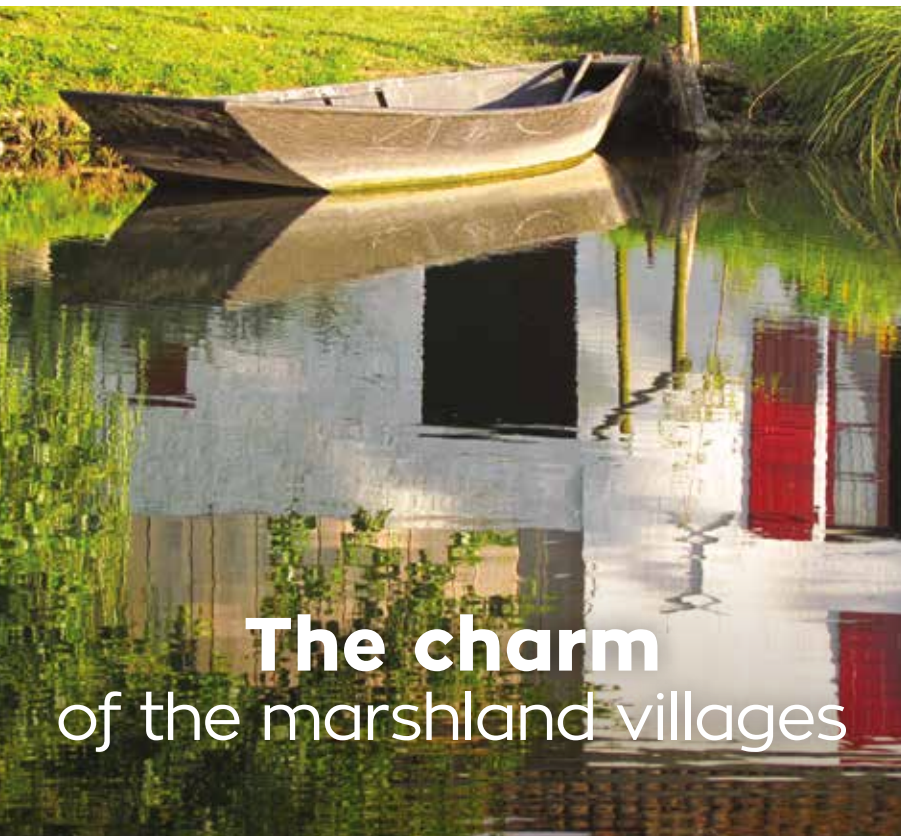


**LET'S TASTE...**



**The honey from the "Butineuses vagabondes"**

11 rue de Rimombœuf  
in Saint-Georges-de-Rex  
+33 (0)6 87 84 14 70  
[www.lesbutineusesvagabondes.com](http://www.lesbutineusesvagabondes.com)



# The charm of the marshland villages

Since the first developments of the Marais poitevin, men have sought to protect themselves from floods or the onslaught of the ocean by settling on the former islands and on the limits of the wet area. Over the years, villages have structured themselves in the shape of the islands – such as Taugon, Vix or La Ronde – or along the waterways such as Damvix or Coulon. Strolling in small streets called “venelles” and discovering the platforms and slipways enable you to understand the bond between those villages and water.



## ✔ WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

### A boat trip with chains.

Previously, if you wanted to get to the other side without the presence of a bridge, you used a boat with a chain on both extremities of the boat. Then, you just had to pull the chain to go to the other side!

Contact the tourist offices to know their locations.

## OUR FAVOURITE!

The typical habitat of the Green Venice in the street-based villages of La Garette, Arçais...

The constructions, placed along the hillside, extend on a 6 to 9-meter slope between two parallels paths. At the top, the home leads to the street, at the bottom the dependencies lead to the waterway.



## A traditional and sustainable architecture

Sober forms, soft colours and materials from the territory are what characterises the habitat in the Marais poitevin. The old poplar varieties were used for framework. They supported reed beds on which tiles made of clay form the marshlands and produced in the local factories were laid out. The blonde stones surrounding the windows and doors resemble the calcareous stones from the marshes' limits.



## 📍 WHERE SHOULD WE GO?



Visit the “Maison de la Meunerie” (House of Milling) in Nieul-sur-l’Autise and get inside the watermill. Follow the miller’s footsteps and discover this authentic site, in activity since 1728, with all the stories about milling.

16 rue du Moulin in Rives-d’Autise ☎ +33 (0)2 51 52 47 43 [www.maisondelameunerie-vendee.fr](http://www.maisondelameunerie-vendee.fr)

Discover the local heritage at La Grève-sur-Mignon’s old brickworks and get to know everything “from the bri to the brick”.

La Pie Pistrelle ☎ +33 (0)6 61 58 06 28 – [www.lapiepistrelle.fr](http://www.lapiepistrelle.fr)

Hike and take time to discover... “Nattes” path in Benet (9 km).

Vendée Sèvre Autise Tourist Office ☎ +33 (0)2 51 87 23 01

Charrouin Island Circuit in Taugon (10 km)

Aunis Marais poitevin Tourist Office ☎ +33 (0)5 46 01 12 10

Hiking trail on the history of Arçais (10 km)

Niort-Marais poitevin-Vallée de la Sèvre niortaise Tourist Office ☎ +33 (0)5 49 24 18 79



Master Jean’s house, which dated from 1874, is part of the local heritage. It was designed ecologically while respecting the biotope. Despite the lack of possibility in the foundations, its solidity has endured through the years. Its orientation benefits from plenty of sunshine. The vegetation works as windbreak... Our elders’ habitat was well-designed. 🗣

Philippe Maupetit, owner

## 🔔 DON’T MISS...

The floating market at Vanneau-Irleau’s harbour.

On the last Saturday in July, producers offer their speciality in their boat: local meats, donkey’s milk soap, honey, “tourteau fromager” (a local cheesecake), fruits and vegetables...

Magné International Painting Festival.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend of July, painters must create an artwork exclusively related to the territory.



## THE REGIONAL NATURAL PARK IS ACTING!

The park is helping people to build or renovate homes in a sustainable way, while also respecting the architecture and landscapes.



## Three harbours, three cities with a rich heritage

### Niort, from the banks of the Sèvre river to the doors of the marsh

In the heart of the Sèvre valley stands Niort, a former river port up to the last century. With a very eclectic, architectural heritage, including a beautiful 12<sup>th</sup> century dungeon, this city is also the starting point of beautiful trips to the Green Venice. Located after the Boinot harbour, the old chamois leather factory is a witness of an industrial past which contributed to the city's wealth. This site has been rehabilitated nowadays and hosts leisure, cultural pr touristic activities.

### La Rochelle, the Beautiful

Facing the Ré, Aix and Oléron islands, this city with an astonishing architectural heritage is, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful gateways to the Ocean. Stroll by bike or by foot on the Old Harbour and in the historic centre, embark on a mission to discover its treasures – streets with arcades, half-timbered houses, mansion houses – or its maritime landscapes... while enjoying a permanent marine wind and radiant light.

### Fontenay-le-Comte, city of the Renaissance

A former river port on the Vendée river, Fontenay-le-Comte is a link between the plain and the Marsh. This city, which has had its heyday during the Renaissance period, is characterised nowadays by its rich architecture and its peculiar laid-back atmosphere. Beautiful residences, shady parks and charming places are reminders of the city's prestigious past.



### OUR FAVOURITES!

**Fontenay-le-Comte's marked routes**, called "Cœur de ville", that will bring you through the streets to the most beautiful houses...

**The green belt trails.** After strolling in the old streets to discover Niort's treasures, take the small bridges near the dungeon to reach the Sèvre niortaise riverbanks that will lead you to Coulon... and even to the ocean!



# Inspirations across the river

Here we are, at the end of the journey...  
Perfumes, lights, sounds of the nature: my senses are all awakened.  
Each trip, each season brings its share of surprises.  
I want to see in Autumn the coastline striding with equinox tides,  
I want to feel the magic of a flooded nature in winter...  
I will be back to capture more unique moments.

## Contact details of Tourist Offices

**CHARENTE-MARITIME**  
**Aunis Marais poitevin**  
Marans, Surgères  
☎ 05 46 01 12 10  
[www.aunis-maraispoitevin.com](http://www.aunis-maraispoitevin.com)

**DEUX-SÈVRES**  
**Niort Marais poitevin-  
vallée de la Sèvre niortaise**  
Niort, Coulon, Arçais,  
Point Info : Saint-Hilaire-la-Palud  
☎ 05 49 24 18 79  
[www.niortmaraispoitevin.com](http://www.niortmaraispoitevin.com)

**VENDÉE**  
**Pays de Fontenay-Vendée**  
☎ 02 51 69 44 99  
[www.fontenay-vendee-tourisme.com](http://www.fontenay-vendee-tourisme.com)

**La Tranche-sur-Mer**  
☎ 02 51 30 33 96  
[www.latranchesurmer-tourisme.fr](http://www.latranchesurmer-tourisme.fr)

**Sud Vendée Marais poitevin**  
☎ 02 51 87 23 01  
[www.maraispoitevin-vendee.com](http://www.maraispoitevin-vendee.com)

**Destination Vendée Grand Littoral**  
Angles, Longeville-sur-Mer,  
Saint-Benoist-sur-Mer  
☎ 02 51 33 34 64  
[www.destination-vendeegrandlittoral.com](http://www.destination-vendeegrandlittoral.com)

**Sud Vendée Littoral**  
La Faute-sur-Mer,  
L'Aiguillon-sur-Mer,  
Saint-Michel-en-l'Herm,  
Saint-Denis-du-Payré,  
Luçon, Chaillé-les-Marais,  
Mareuil-sur-Lay-Dissais  
☎ 02 51 56 37 37  
[www.sudvendeelittoral.com](http://www.sudvendeelittoral.com)

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**Le Parc**  
naturel régional  
du Marais poitevin

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For more information  
**about the Marais poitevin**  
**Regional Natural Park**

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**About our actions:**

[pnr.parc-marais-poitevin.fr](http://pnr.parc-marais-poitevin.fr)

**About our trips:**

[www.parc-marais-poitevin.fr](http://www.parc-marais-poitevin.fr)

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