

Limoges > Issoudun

Tuesday July 14th • Stage 10 • 194.5 km

Region

● Limousin

With just over 730,000 inhabitants, Limousin is the second least populated region of Metropolitan France after Corsica. For a long time, the region remained isolated from major road connections, with its demography having constantly decreased over the past century. However, Limousin is making up for lost time. The creation of the A20 motorway linking Paris to Toulouse, in addition to the opening of the transversal A89 Bordeaux-Clermont-Ferrand motorway have facilitated access to the Massif Central region. The Poitiers-Limoges high speed rail link (TGV), as well as the opening of several air routes to England and to Belgium have boosted the trend.

Indeed, the Limousin region has known how to take advantage of its apparent drawbacks, attracting tourists in quest of that authentic quiet holiday. Tourism, in fact, offers vast development perspectives in a region where cattle farming (comprising more cattle heads than inhabitants) influences local fare.

Website: <http://www.cr-limousin.fr>

Counties

● Upper-Vienne

Prefecture: Limoges
Sub-prefectures: Bellec, Rochechouart
Population: 367,000
Website: <http://www.cg87.fr/>

● Creuse

Prefecture: Guéret
Sub-prefecture: Aubusson
Population: 125,000
Website: <http://www.creuse.fr/>

Region

● Centre

Beyond the cliché of the immense corn fields of Beauce, making it the leading grain-producing region in France, the region

of Centre boasts wide variety of landscapes and natural environments: forests, lakes, heathland, peat bogs moors not forgetting the River Loire and its sandbanks. Therefore the forest of Orleans is the biggest national forest in France, while thousands of tiny lakes go through Sologne and Brenne.

Naturally such diversity is largely influenced by the River Loire, which crosses the region from east to west and supplies its many tributaries with water. The castles of the Loire Valley and the fine and fruity wines of Touraine make the region a tourist magnet which is home to three regional nature parks: Brenne, Loire-Anjou-Touraine and Perche.

Website: <http://www.regioncentre.fr>

County

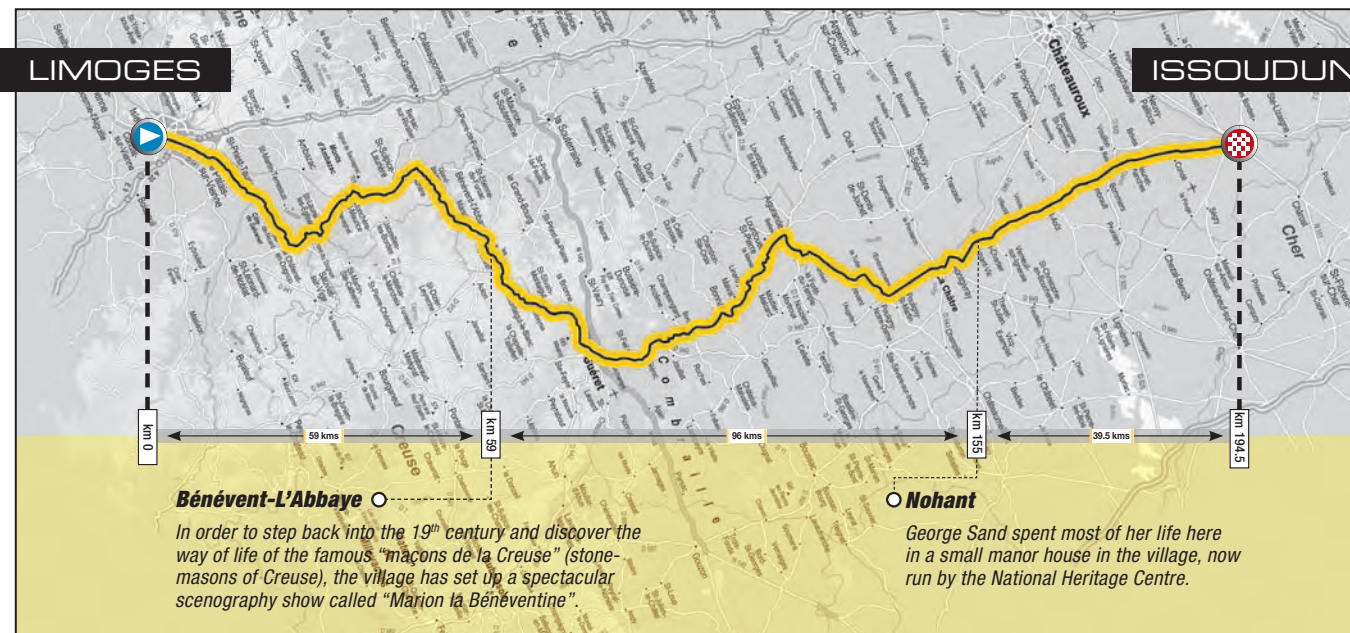
● Indre

Prefecture: Châteauroux
Sub-prefectures: Le Blanc, La Châtre, Issoudun
Population: 240,000
Website: www.berryindre.com/

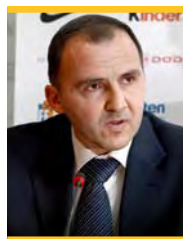


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The Tour pays a visit to...



Frédéric Forte

photo : Presse Sports

Frédéric Forte, the former Limoges basketball team captain, boasts 75 selections for the French National team, while winning both the French Championships 3 times and the European Cup once with Limoges.

Now 39 years old, he is currently the Chairman of the Limoges Basketball Club.

"I spent seven years as player with Limoges and experienced my greatest sensations. In 2004, when the CSP (Limoges basketball club) filed for bankruptcy, I knew that the adventure could not end just like that. And now things seem to be picking up again. We have moved up into "Nationale 1" league and now we are in "Pro B" with an average 4,000 spectators and a healthy financial situation. The attachment for this club also comes from my relations with Limoges. We have all the advantages of a large town, though without the inconveniences. In five minutes, I am right out in the country, in the middle of the woods and

alongside rivers, together with my daughters and my dog. Every Sunday, we take an outing, our preference being the "Mille Vaches" Plateau. I also enjoy strolling through the pedestrian areas, Place des Bancs or the "Halles" (covered market). Apart from that, I love going to the restaurant called "La Chapelle Saint-Martin": here again, just ten minutes from the town centre, in Nieul, we are parachuted into an old bourgeois home with a vast veranda and grounds filled with bicentenary trees. Like many Frenchmen, I follow the Tour de France, though am sometimes in two minds about matters: on the one hand, the difficulty to grasp the real feelings of the cyclist, while on the other, certain awe before such strenuous efforts. When I was young, I used to do a lot of cycling in the hilly areas of Normandy. My parents having bought me a new water bottle, my brother and I used to teward ourselves points when we reached the hilltops. Just talking about it takes me back twenty years."

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- Along the way
- Arrival town

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▶ LIMOGES

Limoges today

Cultural urbanism

For the past ten years, the town has initiated several development projects, notably in areas of leisure and culture: the regional conservatory has thus been renovated and extended, while a third cinema complex has been built on the outskirts of the town. In 2007 the Limoges Zénith was inaugurated. Essentially built of wood and designed by the architect Bernard Tschumi, it was a highlight of this cultural planning policy.



Limoges Zénith - Photo : Mairie de Limoges

European Ceramics' Centre

The European Ceramics' Centre is a professional community (industrials, scientists, technologists, instructors, etc.) having joined forces, not only to defend and to develop this traditional industrial sector of Limoges, but also and above all, to seek new outlets and applications. Hence, this Centre specialises in new devices for the home, for energy saving and production, for health, for optics, for electronics and even for optoelectronics. In three years, 41 projects have been launched for a budget of 81 million Euros and 200 jobs have been created, while at the same time, three research centres and four production units have been established.

- **Population:** 139,000 inhabitants, natives known as "Limougeauds" (m), "Limougeaudes" (f)
- **Economy:** porcelain, leather (JM Weston), European Ceramics' Centre
- **Local celebrities:** Joseph-Louis Gay-Lussac (chemist & physician), Sadi Carnot (French President), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Impressionist artist), Jean Giraudoux (French diplomat & writer), Richard Dacoury (basketball player)
- **Sports club:** CSP Limoges (basketball)
- **Festivals:** "Francophonies en Limousin" (Festival of new-generation actors, musicians, etc. using the French language), "Lire à Limoges" (Reading in Limoges), "Danse Émoi" (contemporary dance), "Festival Urbaka" (street art), "Cuivres en Fête" (copper festival), "Eclats d'Émail" (jazz), "Frairie des Petits Ventres" (historical culinary festival with gastronomy dating back to the Middle Ages)
- **Labels of approval:** "Art and History" town, European "Town-in-Bloom" Gold Medal in 2001. Member of the European network of ceramic towns
- **Local specialties:** porcelain, enamel, Limousine beef, chestnut pudding (thick sausage)
- **Website:** <http://www.ville-limoges.fr>

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LIMOGES

Limoges and cycling

Traditionally, just a few weeks after the Tour de France, the region is again at the centre of cycling news on the occasion of the “Tour du Limousin” (cycle race around the Limousin region). Limoges has nevertheless welcomed the Tour de France 13 times, even organising the “Grand Départ” (initial start of the race) in 1970: Eddy Merckx took advantage of this first stage to mark his tracks by winning the prologue, just as he did in many other places along the Tour. In 1995, it was Lance Armstrong who crossed the line in victory, pointing a finger to the sky in memory of his team mate, Fabio Casartelli, who had lost his life two days earlier in a fall in the Portet d’Aspet descent.

Limousin is also the birthplace of two famous French cyclists, Raymond Poulidor, the tireless rider, still one of the most popular former participants of the Tour, and Luc Leblanc, 1994 World Champion and former Yellow Jersey wearer, an honour that “Poupou” (Poulidor) never had.



Eddy Merckx during the 1970 prologue in Limoges - Photo : Presse Sports

- **1st century BC:** Foundation of “Augustoritum”, or “the ford of Augustus”, the Latin name for “Lé-movices” whose Gaulish people baptised the town (thereby “Limoges”).
- **1152:** The town, divided between the “Cité” under religious power and the “Château” managed by nobility, fell into the clutches of England following the marriage of Henri Plantagenet (Henri II of England) and Eleanor of Aquitaine. This era saw the beginning of a first bout of the Hundred Years’ War (possibly less known than latter periods).
- **1370:** The City chose to pass under control of the King of France. Edward, the Black Prince, intervened and slaughtered the population.
- **17th century:** Formation of many penitent orders with the organisation of processions. Limoges was named the “Holy City”.
- **1765:** Discovery of a kaolin seam in Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche - the start of the porcelain industry.
- **1792:** Reuniting of the “Cité” and the “Château”.
- **1848 and 1851:** Working-class rioting and revolt.
- **1895:** Creation of the “CGT” labour union in Limoges. The “Holy City” became the “Red City”.
- **1905:** One death recorded during the labour uprising in porcelain factories.
- **1914:** Marshal Joffre despatched officers relieved of their command to Limoges. Hence, the French term “limogeage” (dismissal).

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▶ LIMOGES
“Limogeage” (dismissal)

The French verb “limoger” (to dismiss), and the tradition of “limogeage” (dismissal), date back to Marshal Joffre. Its practice had become commonplace since its “invention” in 1914. Indeed, after France’s first military setbacks at the beginning of the Great War, Joffre, believing that many of his officers were demonstrating reprehensible incompetency, decided to remove them from the front and to post them to the 12th military region where Limoges was situated among others.

The sanction had nothing to do with life in Limoges, which was very pleasant, but rather aimed at banishing these officers, judged useless, or even a nuisance. Limoges was said to have a poor reputation in relation to the soldiers, due to the inhabitants’ strong anti-military feeling ignited nine years earlier during the 1905 workers’ uprising, quelled by the Army in a bloody feud. During the preliminary stages of the Battle of the Marne, a first contingent of 58 officers was thus despatched to the rear, with a total of 150 to 200 high-ranking soldiers being “limogé” (dismissed), i.e. 40% in all. In reality, less than twenty or so officers were actually posted to Limoges, the others being despatched to other parts of the county of



View of Saint-Étienne Bridge from the banks of the River Vienne
Photo : Mairie de Limoges

Upper Vienne, as well as to Charente, Corrèze, Creuse or Dordogne. Hence, the most famous “limogé” officers were Generals Ruffey and Lanrezac, who never set foot in Limoges. The word “limogeage”, which came into existence in 1916, may just as well have been “angoulémage” or “brivage” (denoting the towns of Angoulême or Brive). However, Limoges was the most famous town of this military region and the seat of its headquarters. Since, the term no longer applies to a simple military context, but refers to any dismissal of a high-ranking official, whatever the business sector. A cycling team manager, for example, may thus be “limogé”, though not the rider!

SAINT-ÉTIENNE CATHEDRAL

The main church of Limoges and seat of the Bishopric: construction starting in 1273, it was only terminated in 1888 when the original Romanesque bell tower was attached to the nave once again.

SAINT-MICHEL-DES-LIONS CHURCH(14th century)

This edifice is characteristic of the church-cum-grand-hall Plantagenet style. Ever since the French Revolution, it has safeguarded the remains of Saint-Martial.

BENEDICTINE STATION

The new railway station is the work of René Gonthier, who has designed a building made of reinforced concrete, covered with calcareous slabs and topped by a dome.

AURELIEN DUBOUCHÉ NATIONAL PORCELAIN MUSEUM

This building in eclectic style, inspired from the Renaissance period, was built by Henri Mayeux and inaugurated in 1900. It houses vast collections of porcelain, earthenware, stoneware, glass and pottery.

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Along the way...

UPPER-VIENNE (87)

This county stands on granite stone wherefrom quaint local villages and proud castles were carved, long before its sturdiness was used for the Parisian pavements. But besides granite stone, the ground of Upper-Vienne is splattered with kaolin, the clay that has brought fame to Limoges by way of its porcelain. Far from ignoring its past, Upper-Vienne has taken advantage of such resources to promote its revival, using modern ceramic techniques to enhance the benefits. The setting of such companies as Legrand, the world leader in low-voltage electrical goods, has also contributed to this new lease of life.

However, Upper-Vienne's history and heritage are still omnipresent with its many well-kept abbeys and Romanesque churches (Salignac, Châteauponsac), its castles that attract many a tourist (Châlus, Châlucaet, Montbrun, Rochechouart) and, of course, its quality regional agriculture (the Limousine cow).

CREUSE (23)

At equal distance from Paris, Lyon and Bordeaux, the county of Creuse, with its 125,000 inhabitants spread across 260 towns, is considered a thinly-populated county. In a matter of a century and a half, doubly affected by the rural exodus and the First World War, its population has diminished by half. Since 1990, the demographic erosion has nevertheless slowed down. At the same time, the migratory remainder has become positive again, with the most recent estimations predicting a demographic increase. One-third of the population in Creuse is over the age of 60 – perhaps a foreshadow of France in the next ten to twenty years?

Urban communities tend to be concentrated around La Souterraine (5,600 inhabitants), Aubusson (5,000 inhabitants) and Bourgueuf (3,500 inhabitants), not forgetting Guéret (14,600 inhabitants), which, combined with Sainte-Feyre, constitutes the unique urban centre of Creuse, having a significant pool of businesses and workforce.

BÉNÉVENT-L'ABBAYE - km 59 Pop. 850

At Bénévent-l'Abbaye, a stopover along Saint James of Compostela's pilgrimage route, a scenography show called "Marion la Bénéventine" enables visitors to discover the lifestyle of a young girl from Creuse (a "Creusoise" in French) at the end of the 19th century.

Just like storytellers of the past, actors portray the key personalities of village life in Creuse at that time, for example, cutters of shingles, used as roofing material throughout France, or "maçons de la Creuse" (stone-masons of Creuse).

"MAÇONS DE LA CREUSE" (STONE-MASONS OF CREUSE)

At the end of the Middle Ages, workers in Creuse (stone-masons, carpenters, stone-cutters, tile-makers, plasterers, painters, locksmiths, etc.) set off on foot across France, notably to Paris, Lyon, Bordeaux or La Rochelle.

They would depart in the spring, returning just before winter. Working and living conditions were harsh. They participated in the construction of cathedrals ("Notre-Dame de Paris"), palaces ("Palais des Papes" in Avignon), hotels, houses, bridges and dykes, e.g. the "Digue de la Rochelle". Initially temporary, this emigration became somewhat permanent, Creuse losing half its population between 1850 and 1950.

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Along the way...

GUÉRET - km 82 Pop. 14,000

The town was founded in the 7th century upon the initiative of Lantarius, Count of Limoges, who persuaded Pardulphe the monk (Saint Pardoux) to establish a monastery here. This was demolished by the Vikings in the 9th century, but a town was developed. “Guéret” in French implies tilled land, though not sown (which was apparently the case for the land where the town was built).

Guéret became the capital of the Upper Marche district in 1514, with its vocation as an administrative seat being confirmed in 1790, becoming the county town of Creuse. Today, it is the prefecture town, the General Council having set up office in the beautiful “Hôtel des Moneyroux”, built in the 15th century.

Guéret’s modern history is marked by the revolt of the Ajain farmers, who came to Guéret in 1848 to release their comrades, having refused to pay the tax demanded by the new Republic. Confrontation with law and order resulted in sixteen deaths.

The end of the 19th and early 20th centuries saw a multiplication of rural exodus and the departure of the famous “maçons de la Creuse” (stone-masons of Creuse), who deserted both the town and the county. In the 1960s, approximately 1,600 orphans from La Réunion were welcomed in order to

repopulate Creuse and the Limousin region. Upon arrival, they were taken to a home in Guéret.

Just like the rest of Creuse, Guéret witnessed a significant drop in its population over the space of a century, though quite unexpectedly, recovery became apparent at the turn of the decade, most probably due to the arrival of British and Dutch citizens to the area, attracted by low-cost housing.

Who better than the great novelist, Marcel Jouhandeau, to recount the life, the joys, the sorrows, the qualities and the small failings of the inhabitants of Guéret? For the writer, who passed away in 1979, Guéret was known as “Chaminadour”.

Marc Durant, a Guéret native, participated in five Tours de France between 1981 and 1985. He notched up his best placing in 1983, when he finished 30th overall. In 1996, he became the Agrigel Creuse team manager.

In 2004, Guéret hosted the stage arrival, the race having departed from Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat, the sprint finish being won by Robbie McEwen.

INDRE (36)

The river which runs through Indre gave the county its name. It has a preserved environment, an eventful past, and traditions and a heritage which are kept alive today, delighting its visitors.

They will be able to appreciate the county by randomly strolling through its six different “pays” (areas): The “Pays de Valençay– Boischaud Nord”: the wooded area bordering with Touraine, which experienced the splendour of Napoleonic diplomacy, around the Prince of Talleyrand’s magnificent Renaissance castle in Valençay. The “Pays d’Issoudun” and “Champagne Berrichonne”: the endless cereal plains of “Champagne Berrichonne” have a few hidden treasures such as the light and fruity vintages of Reuilly (AOC), the green lentils of Berry and the former royal town of Issoudun.

The “Pays de La Châtre” in Berry: around Nohant, where George Sand lived and welcomed Balzac, Chopin, Delacroix, Liszt and Flaubert, a variety of exhibitions and Romantic and Chopin festivals have been created.

The “Pays Val de Creuse - Val d’Anglin”: the spectacular surroundings from Crozant to Tournon-Saint-Martin inspired the great Impressionists such as Monet or Guillaumin. They provide a perfect setting for outdoor leisure activities.

Brenne Regional Nature Park: it is also known as the land of a thousand lakes.

The “Pays Castelroussin - Val de l’Indre”: the meadows of Belle-Isle and of Saint-Gildas, the public garden and the Cordeliers Garden in the heart in the town, and the surrounding national forest which covers 5,000 hectares, make Châteauroux a very “green town”.

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Along the way...

AIGURANDE - km 122.5 **Pop. 1,900**

Aigurande has become a regular of the Tour de France, since this village of the county of Indre was one of the smallest places to host a stage last year. As for etymology, the name “Aigurande” derives from the Gaulish word, “Equoranda”, meaning “border town”. Indeed, it borders Indre and Creuse, as well as the Marche and the Berry regions.

Nestled between the Valley of Creuse and the “Vallée Noir” (Black Valley), in the midst of bocage country, water is ever present. La Bouzanne takes its source here, while La Vauvre, a first-rate fishing river, meanders along, with numerous wells decorating village squares, others being concealed in private courtyards.

Proud of its culinary feats, Aigurande invites you in the summer to the August “Fête de l’Écrevisse” (crayfish festival) to taste this delicious fresh water shell fish.

LA CHÂTRE - km 146 **Pop. 4,500**

District county town in the nature area of “Boischaud-Sud”, in the heart of the “Vallée Noire” (Black Valley), La Châtre is a pretty town built on a hillside overlooking the River Indre. Only the keep of the former castle is a reminder that La

Châtre owes its name to a Roman Fort - “castrum”. The seignior of La Châtre was under the control of the Princes of Déols and the Lords of Châteauroux. In 1176, Raoul of Déols authorised the inhabitants to organise fairs, a tradition that still continues today.

Dear to George Sand, to whom a museum has been dedicated inside the 15th century keep, “Donjon des Chauvigny”, the town has managed to preserve an exceptional architectural heritage with its wooden houses and quaint “P’tit Mur” district.

La Châtre also has had a racing circuit since 1928, hosting Formula 3 and French Championship races, allowing its inhabitants to discover such future champions as Jacky Stewart and Alain Prost. In July, besides excitement for the Tour de France, the town has organised the Frédéric Chopin International Festival, ever since 1992, attracting many enthusiasts of the pianist-composer worldwide; indeed, the artist used to reside in La Châtre with George Sand.

La Châtre is the birthplace of Marcel Dussault, the winner of three stages of the Tour de France in 1949 (when he fleetingly wore the yellow jersey), in 1950 and in 1954 respectively.

Another wearer of the yellow jersey was Cédric Vasseur, who made a name for him-

self in 1997, winning the sole stage to have arrived in this town. The following year, however, La Châtre hosted a stage departure, ultimately won by Mario Cipollini.

NOHANT - km 155 **Pop. 480**

Nohant, home to George Sand where she was brought up, wrote most of her books and passed away, boasts a worldwide reputation. The home of George Sand is a small manor house dating back to the 18th century, initially built for the Governor of Vierzon and bought in 1793 by Mrs Dupin de Francueil, daughter of Maurice de Saxe and grandmother of the author. George Sand welcomed illustrious guests here: Franz Liszt and Marie d’Agoult, Honoré de Balzac, Frédéric Chopin, Gustave Flaubert and even Eugène Delacroix, who set up his workshop there. The estate is now Government property, run by the Centre for National Heritage.

George Sand was buried in the tiny cemetery of Nohant, where she died on 8 June 1876. Victor Hugo sent a message that can be read on her tomb: “je pleure une morte, mais je salue une immortelle” (I cry for the dead one, but I hail an immortal).

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ISSOUDUN

Issoudun today

Congress Centre "Champs-Élysées"

Since 2004, Issoudun boasts original and modern facilities - the "Champs-Élysées" Congress Centre, unique in its kind in the region. With its clear lines, its warm and comfortable interior, the Congress Centre transposes the image of a dynamic city and basin, offering new resources to the economic and business world. No halls of this size and type were in fact able to hold fairs, seminars, conventions or congresses near at hand.



The Congress Centre - Photo : ville d'Issoudun -YD

University town

With its IUT (polytechnic) and its degree course, "Communication et Commercialisation des produits culturels" (Cultural Communication and Marketing), Issoudun is renowned as the smallest university town in France. In addition, Issoudun has for several years been offering courses acknowledged in the field of music (manager, assistant director, roadie), in collaboration with the training body, "Les Formations d'Issoudun".

TV channel

The town has become the headquarters of the brand new Berry television channel, inaugurated in 2007: "BIP-TV (Berry Issoudun Première)". Its programmes are broadcast on the terrestrial network and via TNT (French digital TV), wherever covered.

- **Population:** 14,300 inhabitants, natives known as "Issoldunois" (m), "Issoldunoises" (f)
- **Economy:** luxury industry (Louis Vuitton - fashion & leather goods), aeronautics, viticulture
- **Local celebrities:** Honoré de Balzac, Maurice Lachâtre, Auguste Borget (painter).
- **Festivals:** guitar festival, street theatre festival ("Fêtes de la Tour Blanche")
- **Local fare:** Issoudun marzipan, goat's milk cheese, Berry green lentils, Reuilly wines
- **Labels of approval:** Town in Bloom ("Ville Fleurie" - 4 flowers award)
- **Website:** www.issoudun.fr

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ISSOUDUN

Issoudun and cycling

Issoudun is welcoming the Tour de France for the first time this year. Having said that, Issoudun is no novice in the game, being able to claim its implication in a glorious episode of French cycling. Indeed, at the 2008 Summer Olympics (Beijing), Kevin Sireau, who obtained his first membership card from the Lower Berry Cycling Association ("Association Cycliste Bas Berry (ACBB)"), and who had to train on the local cycling track, was Silver Medalist in the Team Speed Cycling Event, together with Grégory Baugé and Arnaud Tournant. Kevin Sireau was also 2008 Individual World Vice-Champion behind the Scotsman, Chris Hoy.



Saint-Roch Museum - Photo : Ville d'Issoudun -YD

- **Roman Empire:** "Exoldunum", a stronghold built on the hill where the "Tour Blanche" (White Tower) currently stands, was destroyed then rebuilt by Caesar.
- **1187 à 1195:** Philippe Augustus and Richard the Lionheart confronted each other for control of the town.
- **1202:** Completion of the keep, today known as the "Tour Blanche" (White Tower), whose construction was ordered by Richard and completed by his enemy! The town in fact came under control of the Kingdom of France in 1200.
- **1356:** Edward, the Black Prince, ransacked the town.
- **1651:** Issoudun, having become a prosperous town due to its agriculture and leather goods, was destroyed by fire.
- **1790:** The French Revolution chose Châteauroux as the prefecture of the county of Indre, at the expense of Issoudun, which then became a peaceful garrison town.
- **1852:** Balzac wrote the novel, "La Rabouilleuse" (English title: "The Black Sheep"), which takes place in Issoudun.
- **1944:** In a strategic position during the Second World War, Issoudun was one of the rare towns to have been awarded the War Medal for its participation in Resistance activities.
- **1950:** Installation of a short-wave radio transmitter used by RFI (Radio France Internationale).

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ISSOUDUN

“La Rabouilleuse” (English title: “The Black Sheep”)

“N'en déplaise à Paris, Issoudun est l'une des plus vieilles villes de France”. (“With all due respects to Paris, Issoudun is one of the oldest towns of France.”) Balzac.

Published in 1852, “La Rabouilleuse” is one of the most successful and least known of the great novels comprising Balzac’s “La Comédie Humaine” collection. The first part, which takes place in Paris, sets the characters: the Bridau Family, Agathe and her two sons, Joseph the painter and Philippe the soldier.

In the second part of the novel, the Bridau’s go in turn to Issoudun, with the aim of retrieving the fortune of Agathe’s brother, Jean-Jacques Rouget, having fallen under the influence of the scheming Flore Brazier. Flore, who lives with her lover, Maxence Gillet, is nicknamed “la rabouilleuse” - the one who fishes crayfish in troubled waters. [NB. The official English title is not a literal translation, focus thus being moved from Flore to Agathe’s two sons.]

Fight for fortune was without mercy and quite eventful. It also enables the reader to stroll through Issoudun, the town that Balzac knew so well, often coming to spend time with his friends, the Carraud Family, who lived in Frapesle Castle. Indeed, the castle’s poplar-tree drive staged many an episode of the novel.



La “Tour Blanche” (White Tower) - Photo : ville d’Issoudun - YD

Upon arrival in Issoudun, Agathe and Joseph came to “Place Misère” (Misery Square), now the Boulevard Stalingrad car park.

In “La Rabouilleuse”, mention is also made of an inn run by the Cognet parents. No doubt, it used to be where “Hôtel de la Cognette” now stands. “Le Café Militaire” (The Military Café), where many of the novel’s scenes took place, actually existed, located on “Place d’Armes” (Arms Square), today called “Place du 10 Juin 1944” (10 June 1944 Square).

La “Tour Blanche” (White Tower), symbol of Issoudun, also plays a central role in “La Rabouilleuse”. Finally, “30 Rue de la République” was where Auguste Borget, the painter and friend of Balzac, lived.

LA “TOUR BLANCHE” (WHITE TOWER)

This is a 12th century keep, assigned to Richard the Lionheart. Recently restored, it has become the stage of a beautiful twilight show, dedicated to knighthood and entitled “Les Légendaires d’Issoudun” (Legendary Issoudun).

SAINT-ROCH HOSPICE MUSEUM

It stands on the site of the former Hôtel-Dieu (hospital), founded in the 12th century and rebuilt in the 15th century. This vast, beautiful edifice comprises a chapel and patients’ wards dating back to the 15th century, as well as two 17th and 18th century wings. This listed building harbours many a relic: the Trees of Jesse, archaeological objects from Celtic times, 8th and 15th century sculptures, not forgetting the apothecary’s shop.

sightseeing...