



Spotlight On...

Museums of the Poitou-Charentes



Musée chez Manuel d'Art Populaire



by Mick Austin

Gone are the days when museums had an often deserved reputation for being dull, musty places you'd only visit to escape torrential rain or a snowstorm. Many of today's offerings can often seem quite similar. You know, paintings, porcelain, bits of chipped bone etc. But there are some gems out there. Museums celebrating the quirky and often quite weird. From wireless to wheels, macaroons to mother of pearl and fire-fighting engines to flat-bottomed boats, there's something for everyone.

This DSM guide is by no means complete, but it will give you a flavour of what's on your doorstep. Some are open all-year round and some have free admission. If there is no contact information provided then visit the Poitou-Charentes tourist board website at <http://www.visit-poitou-charentes.com/>

Musée du Charronnage et de la Tonnellerie

Go on, admit it. You've always wanted to know about the ancient ways of making barrels and wheels. Here you can see the original tools of the wheelwright and the cooper.

4 place du Château, 79160 Coulonges-sur-l'Autize. Tel: 05 49 06 10 72. Website: <http://www.ville-coulonges-sur-lautize.fr>

Musée de la TSF

The TSF is the mother of today's radio, television and electronics. This wireless/telegraphy museum, set up in 1992, is dedicated to helping today's visitors rediscover our grandfathers' radios, with more than 500 items on display.

136 rue de Charnay, 79400 Nanteuil. Tel: 05 49 05 55 93. Website: <http://www.haut-val-de-sevre.com>

79 Deux-Sèvres

Musée du Sous Officier

The Non-Commissioned Officer's Museum presents both Saint-Maixent-l'École's military history since 1881 and the history of the French non-commissioned officer corps, from its beginnings under the French monarchy up until today. A memorial is dedicated to the school's heroes, the senior non-commissioned officers who gave their lives for France.

Ecole Nationale des Sous Officiers, Quartier Marchand, 79400 Saint-Maixent-l'École. Tel: 05 49 76 85 30. Website: <http://www.alienor.org/musees/index.php?fre/La-liste-des-villes/Saint-Maixent-l-Ecole/Musee-du-sous-officier>

Musée des Vieux Outils et Miniatures

Fascinating collection of old tools and miniature hand-made objects.

5 rue des Antonins, 79310 Saint-Marc-la-Lande. Tel: 05 49 63 22 91

Musée de la Chasse

In the ancient La Voute Castle, it exhibits and explains all aspects of hunting, from prehistoric times up until the present day.

7 Route de Champicard, 79260 La Crèche. Tel: 05 49 25 95 27.

Musée du Chaboussant

Sheltered within the buildings of an ancient abbey, this museum exhibits everyday life objects from the Pelbois region, including agricultural machines, handicraft tools, furniture, clothes, head wear and small, everyday objects.

Place de la Payse, 79120 Lezay. Website: www.magnain.christian.free.fr



Musée de la TSF.



Musée du Charronnage et de la Tonnellerie



Musée du Chaboussant



86 Vienne

Musée du Macaron

Unique in France, the Macaroon Museum pays homage to generations of skilled workers who built the reputation of Montmorillon as the 'City of the Macaroon'. Discover the story of the little almond biscuit in an entertaining and tasty visit, from the cultivation of the almond tree and the almond's many uses to the invention of the macaroon and its arrival in France.

32 boulevard de Strasbourg, 86500 Montmorillon. Tel: 05 49 83 0338. Website: <http://www.museedumacaron.com>

Musée Rural et Musée du Feu de la Vieillardière

Ancient farm machinery (including a 1925 McCormick tractor) and a collection of fire-fighting equipment from the 1700s.

La Vieillardière, 86230 Leigné-sur-Usseau. Tel: 05 49 86 02 53. Website: <http://www.mable-et-vienne.fr>

Musée de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale dans la Vienne

The only public museum in Vienne (the municipality has part ownership of the collections) dealing with the Second World War. Learn about the lines of demarcation, deportations, the prisoners, forced labour, daily life, the resistance movement, SAS operations, La Vienne under bombing, the secret landings and the planes that were shot down.

18 place de l'Eglise, 86800 Tercé. Tel: 05 49 56 81 39. Website: <http://www.tourisme-vienne.com/en/activite/338/musee-de-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale-dans-la-vienne>

Musée chez Manuel d'Art Populaire

Not your usual kind of museum, this has a bit of everything including old cars, toys, tractors, military equipment, gramophones, dolls, and ornaments. There are nostalgic old advertisements, one of the first Michaux bicycles, a Thai rickshaw, a 1947 Plymouth car, a 1924 fire engine, a Merlin steam machine, a Sikorsky helicopter, a Ford Model T and loads more.

37 avenue de Châtellerault, 86440 Migné-Auxances. Tel: 05 49 52 94 16. Website: <http://www.musee-chez-manuel.com>

Musée d'Archéologie et des Traditions Populaires

Housed in a 16th Century dwelling, the museum reconstructs a typical Poitevin interior with headdresses, clothes and everyday objects from 19th Century Poitou.

Place du Vieux Marché, 86300 Chauvigny. Tel: 05 49 46 35 45. Website: <http://www.chauvigny-patrimoine.fr>



Musée de Préhistoire - Grottes de la Marche et des Fadets

Interactive museum taking you on a journey through the everyday life of men who were masters in engraving. Exceptional collection of inscribed stones of animals and human beings dating back 14,000 years. Animations and guided tours of the museum and the caves of the Marche and the Fadets.

21 route de Montmorillon, BP 23, 86320 Lussac-les-Châteaux. Tel: 05 49 83 39 80. Website: <http://www.lasabline.fr>

Musée du Jeu d'Echecs

Museum of Chess of Scorbé-Clairvaux features 150 games from 75 countries, including the campaign game of Napoleon 1 and Lord Admiral Nelson.

Check it out! Château de Clairvaux, 7 place de Montbron, 86140 Scorbé-Clairvaux. Tel: 05 49 93 88 49.

Ferme Musée des Acadiens

The Acadian line consists of 57 houses built in 1773 for the Acadian families who were expelled from Canada. You can still visit 38 houses built of cob, one of which is furnished and houses the Acadian Museum that retraces the history of the exiles from New France.

Les Huit Maisons, 86210 Archigny. Tel: 05 49 21 54 39. Website: <http://www.tourisme-chatellerault.fr>

Musée de la Maison d'Autrefois

A museum of local art and tradition celebrating the way our grandparents lived, with bonnets, old hairstyles, well made clothes of the 1880s, old toys and a 1940s classroom. There is also a display of typical living rooms, a bushel-maker's workshop, a laundry and a forge.

Rue de la Poste, 86360 Chasseneuil-du-Poitou. Website: www.ville-chasseneuil-du-poitou.fr

Musée Auto Moto Vélo

One of the largest collections of motorcycles in France. Châtellerault used to be a centre for the manufacture of arms, but this museum houses more than 150 vehicles, a collection of different engines, accessories and posters. Try the interactive simulators.

3 rue Clément Krebs, Site de la Manu, 86100 Châtellerault. Tel: 05 49 21 03 46. Website: <http://www.tourisme-vienne.com/en/activite/66/musee-auto-moto-velo>

Musée des Gens de Cherves



Musée Auto Moto Vélo





16 Charente

Musée de l'École Jules Ferry

Living museum of a late 19th Century school classroom. Open all year.

Place de la Mairie, Saint-Gervai, 16700 Nanteuil-en-Vallée. Tel: 05 45 31 89 06.

Musée Gaston Grégor

Living museum of farming life and tools in the 18th Century.

16130 Salles-d'Angles. Tel: 05 45 83 71 13. Website: <http://www.salles-d-angles.a3w.fr>

Musée de la Moto et du Cyclo

Around 150 sports cycles from the 1960s and about 50 French, English and Italian motorcycles from the 1930s to 1970s.

25 rue des Encloux, 16130 Gensac-la-Pallue. Tel: 05 45 36 91 83.

Maison des Gabarriers

Flat-bottomed boats were once built in Saint-Simon. Take a guided tour of the House of the Gabarriers museum, a tour of the village following explanatory signposts, or a boat trip in a gabarre on the Charente river.

Le Bourg, 16120 Saint-Simon. Tel: 05 45 97 33 40.

Musée du Vin, du Cognac et de la Tonnellerie

Guided visits with videos and commentaries in English and French of the Vine, Wine, Cognac and Cooperage Museum. Collections of regional fossils, hand-painted decorations, tasting and sales of Pineau and Cognac.

Domaine de Plaisance, 16300 Lamérac. Tel: 05 45 78 04 61.



Maison du Transbordeur



Musée de l'Aéronautique Navale

17 Charente-Maritime

Musée Napoleon

Napoleon's final asylum on French territory, the Napoleonic museum exhibits numerous relics that once belonged to him (furniture, portraits, keepsakes.). The adjacent African museum presents an artistic, ethnological and zoological collection from central and southern Africa.

Rue Napoléon, 17123 Île-d'Aix. Tel: 05 46 84 66 40. Website: <http://www.musees-nationaux-napoleoniens.org>

Musée de l'Aéronautique Navale

A unique museum in France dedicated to French naval aviation, featuring 33 aircraft and 1500 models.

Rond Point Albert Bignon, BP 90179, 17300 Rochefort. Tel: 05 46 83 37 00. Website: <http://www.anaman.fr>

Musée de la Carte Postale

This shoreline museum contains old post cards, maps and stories from days gone on everyday life in Mortagne.

Port de Mortagne, 17120 Mortagne-sur-Gironde. Tel: 05 46 90 52 90.

Musée des Modèles Réduits

This is one of a kind: 8000sq ft of exhibitions, historic scenes, moving model trains and computer automated naval battles.

12-14 Rue de la Désirée, La Ville en Bois, 17000 La Rochelle. Tel: 05 46 41 68 08. Website: <http://www.museeslarochelle.com>



Musée Napoleon



Maison des Gabarriers



Musée du Vin, du Cognac et de la Tonnellerie



Musée Maritime.

Welcome aboard the ships to be visited in the maritime museum: France 1, the latest meteorological frigate; The Angoumois, a stern fishing trawler; and the bridge of the St Gilles tugboat.

Quai Sénac de Meilhan, 17000 La Rochelle. Tel: 05 46 28 03 00. Website: <http://www.museemaritimelarochelle.fr>

Maison du Transbordeur

A museum next to the Transporter Bridge is devoted to bridges in the Pays Rochefortais, the Charente-Maritime department and elsewhere. Audacious, unusual and challenging structures are the highlights.

Rue de Martrou, 17620 Échillais. Tel: 05 46 83 30 86. Website: <http://www.pont-transbordeur.fr>

Maison de la Nacre

The mother of pearl house has existed since 1954 and specialises in the transformation of shells into various objects, including jewellery. An illustrated museum with 20 display cabinets, a workshop and a meeting with a mother of pearl craftsman.

Place de l'Église, 17123 Île-d'Aix.

Maison de la Baie du Marais Poitevin

The Poitevin Marsh's Bay House is a cultural and touristic site where you can visit the mussel breeding museum and the fortified church Saint Martin of Esnandes. You can also fish by means of a lift net.

Parvis de l'Église, 17137 Esnandes. Tel: 05 46 01 34 64. Website: <http://www.maison-baiemaraispoitevin.fr>

Musée de l'École Publique

Re-live your old schooldays. Located in the old Vergé schoolhouse, the museum presents objects vividly recalling bygone schools and the heritage of a village class in a rural setting. More than 3500 authentic objects.

10 bis rue de la Gare, 17330 Vergné. Tel: 05 46 24 62 89.

Musée des Commerces d'Autrefois

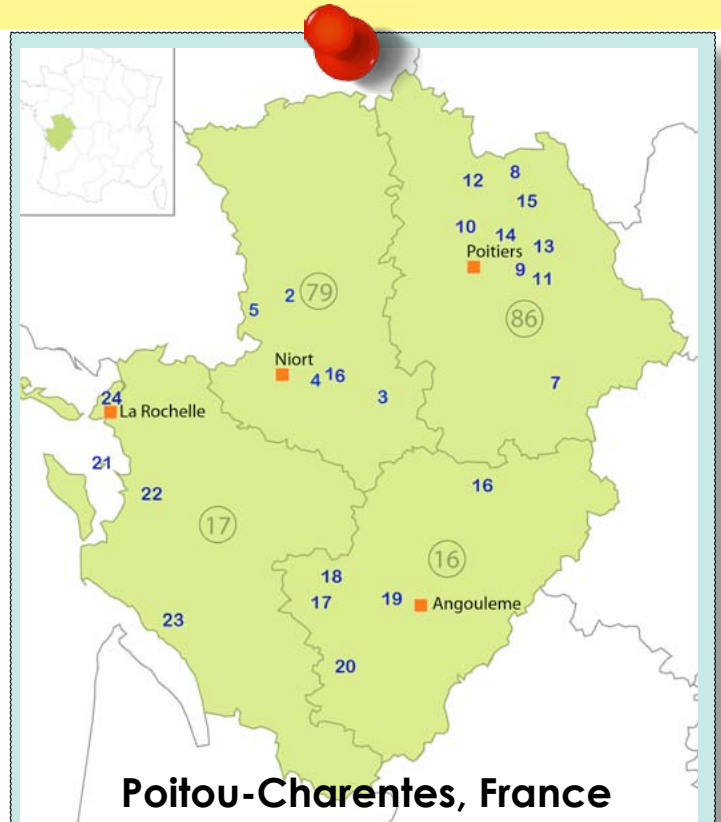
Discover the charm of small shops at the beginning of the century: bistros, hatters, grocery stores, butchers and others.

12 rue Lesson, 17300 Rochefort. Tel: 05 46 83 91 50. Website: <http://www.museedescommerces.com>

Ecomusée de Port des Barques

Devoted to the estuary's maritime history. An exhibition in an oyster shed explains the life cycle of oysters, their environment and the town's traditions. The museum also highlights the history of oyster farming with a display of tools and scales.

Boulevard de la Charente, BP 2, 17730 Port-des-Barques. Tel: 05 46 84 19 19. Website: <http://www.ecomuseeportdesbarques.net>



Poitou-Charentes, France

Deux-Sèvres, 79

1. St Maixent
2. St Marc-la-Lande
3. Lezay
4. La Crèche
5. Coulonges-sur-l'Autize
6. Nanteuil

Vienne, 86

7. Montmorillon
8. Leigné-sur-Usseau
9. Tercé
10. Migné-Auxances
11. Chauvigny
12. Scorbé-Clairvaux
13. Archigny
14. Chasseneuil-du-Poitou
15. Châtelleraut

Charente, 16

16. Nanteuil-en-Vallée
17. Salles-d'Angles
18. Gensac-la-Pallue
19. Saint-Simon
20. Laméac

Charente-Maritime, 17

21. Île-d'Aix
22. Rochefort
23. Mortagne-sur-Gironde
24. La Rochelle

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Musée de la Maison d'Autrefois



Musée de l'École Jules Ferry