

TOWN WALKS

CHINON



VILLES
& PAYS
D'ART &
D'HISTOIRE

CHINON, IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HISTORY

Wedged in between the foot of the Fortress atop its rocky slope and the banks of the Vienne River, Chinon has played a central role for some remarkable historical figures: in the twelfth century, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II Plantagenet extended the Fortress, making it into a palatial castle while developing its defences, and becoming one of their main seats of power, which reached from Scotland to the Pyrenees. In the fifteenth century, during the Hundred Years' War, Chinon was one of the preferred places of refuge to the future Charles VII. It is here that Joan of Arc met him for the first time in 1429. The town and its surroundings were also not only native to the early childhood of the sixteenth century writer François Rabelais, but would also serve as the backdrop to the adventures of his main characters, the giants Pantagruel and Gargantua.

Today, the historic town of Chinon and the treasures of its long and glorious history from many different periods can be discovered along its quaint streets, where one can also enjoy different shops and restaurants and discover various arts, crafts, wine tastings, and local specialties.

Two different town walks are waiting to be discovered:

HISTORIC TOWN CENTRE WALK p. 2

This walk will reveal some of the most important heritage of Chinon. From half-timber houses to town manor houses in stone, from ancient churches to gardens, from medieval to Renaissance and beyond, not forgetting the spectacular view of the town from the left side of the river, you will have a first real sense of the rich history and heritage of Chinon.

CAVE DWELLINGS AND NATURE WALK p. 6

Up above the centre of town, you will discover the unusual and the unexpected from the heights of the rocky hillside down to the river. This walk will take you all the way to the Saint Radegonde Chapel, a surprising, mysterious and unique “troglodytic” chapel carved into the rockface. Yet other rarities await you on this walk like the Collegiate Church of Saint Mexme, which dates back to the year 1000 and today houses a small theatre; and the Jeu de Paume building, or Real Tennis Court, a rare remaining example from the sixteenth century of this sport that dates back to the Middle Ages.

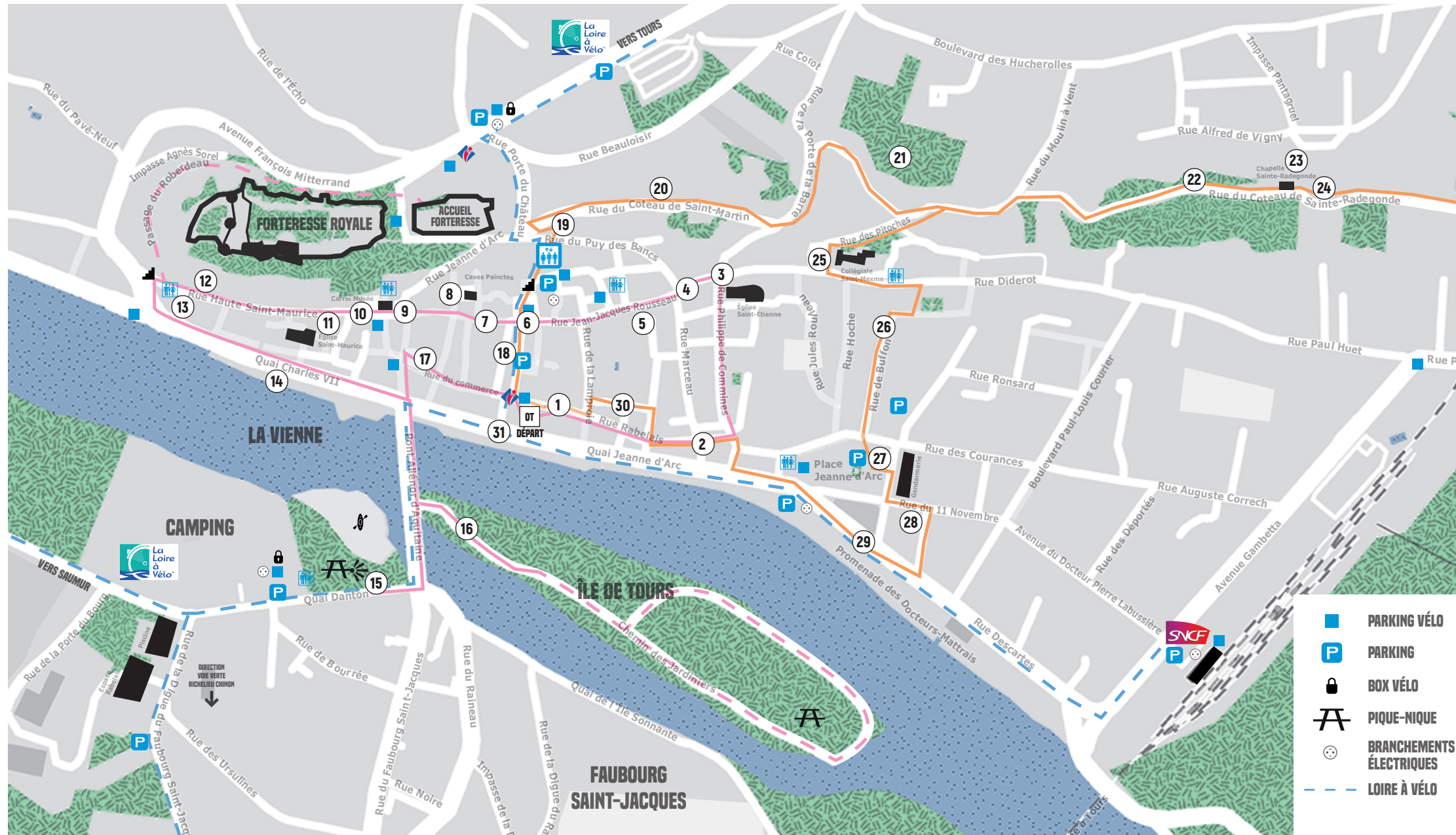


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— Historic Town Centre Walk

— Cave Dwellings and Nature Walk

DEPARTURE : TOURIST OFFICE, 1 RUE RABELAIS

HISTORIC TOWN CENTRE WALK P. 2

- 1.** Rue Rabelais
- 2.** Place Mirabeau
- 3.** Saint-Etienne Church
- 4.** Junction – Carrefour du Puits des Bans
- 5.** Neo-Gothic house
- 6.** Place de la Fontaine and
Place General de Gaulle
- 7.** Rue Voltaire
- 8.** Caves Paintées – the Painted Caves
- 9.** Grand Carroi – the Grand Junction
- 10.** The Carroi Museum of Arts and History
- 11.** Place and Church of Saint Maurice
- 12.** Rue Haute-Saint-Maurice
- 13.** Vieux Marché – the Old Market
- 14.** Quai Charles VII
- 15.** Bridge and Quai Danton
- 16.** Ile de Tours – Islet of Tours
- 17.** Place Victoire

CAVE DWELLINGS AND NATURE WALK P. 6

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- 19.** Elevated Passageway – Elevator
- 20.** Saint Martin Hillside District
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- 22.** Saint Radegonde Hillside District
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- 30.** Jeu de Paume - Real Tennis Court
- 31.** Statue of Rabelais



1. Place Mirabeau

2. Neo-Gothic house

3. Grand Carroi



HISTORIC TOWN CENTRE WALK

1. RUE RABELAIS

The rue Rabelais was created in the nineteenth century, following the line of the demolished fortified defensive walls. The medieval houses that had been built along it were now aligned and given new stone facades. Today, it is an agreeable shopping district lined with restaurants, services, craftsmen and boutiques.

2. PLACE MIRABEAU

This square was developed in the nineteenth century around its little fountain shaded by acacia trees, and is one of the most charming of the town. It is separated from the river by a medieval grange, now divided into several shops where once was stocked merchandise that served to pay taxes in kind or trade.

Going towards the rue Philippe de Commines, the Sous Prefecture is located in the former Augustinian convent dating from the fourteenth century.

3. SAINT ETIENNE CHURCH

Built in the fifteenth century in the Flamboyant Gothic style, it contains a single, vast nave aisle. In the apse, stained glass windows from the nineteenth century recount some of the history of Chinon, notably the recognition and meeting of the future king Charles VII by Joan of Arc in 1429.

4. JUNCTION CARREFOUR DU PUIITS DES BANS

In the middle of this junction, public criers used the well's platform, now gone, to announce the "bans" or the news. Here, one can admire some wonderful half-timber houses, one of which, on the angle, regularly hosts arts and crafts exhibitions.



5. NEO-GOTHIC HOUSE

The rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the main road of the medieval town, with various shops and crafts along it. At N° 59, a nineteenth century house attracts the eye: its picturesque façade, a sculptured fantasy, is typical of the eclectic taste of the period, at once mixing medieval and Renaissance motifs. Opposite, the large house is reputed to have belonged to the Knights Templar.

6. PLACE DE LA FONTAINE AND PLACE GENERAL DE GAULLE

In the heart of the historic town, the General de Gaulle Square is the centre for most of the administrative services along with the Town Hall – the Mairie – and a busy commercial district. In the square just above it, the ancient fountain using Gallo-Roman piping was replaced in 1870 by the present fountain showing the Three Graces.

7. RUE VOLTAIRE

Continuing along the rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau and crossing the square, still the main thoroughfare of the medieval town, a fortified entryway, la Porte de Verdun, or the Verdun Gate, defended access into the closed

walled portion of town. Entering and to the right, the rue Doctor Gendron is lined with fifteenth century houses that boast spiral staircase towers.

8. THE PAINTED CAVES

These caves, or cellars, celebrated by Rabelais in his works, are located in a vast network of quarries and stone galleries carved into the rocky hillside and were in use up until the eighteenth century, and are still used as cellars today. From there, the rue Voltaire is lined with half-timber houses that served as craftsmen's shops in the Middle Ages.

9. GRAND CARROI THE GRAND JUNCTION

This was the main junction of this section of town. When she arrived in Chinon in 1429, Joan of Arc, to whose memory there is a plaque above the well next to the Maison Bleu, stayed for a few days in one of these houses before going up to the castle to meet the future king. The medieval half-timber houses here are remarkable, particularly N° 42, the Maison Rouge, which once held up to three boutiques, and N° 45 which has carved "wolves" holding the beam in their mouths at each end over the shop window.



1. Church of Saint Maurice

2. Maîtrise des Eaux et des Forêts (82 rue Voltaire)

3. View from the Quai Danton



10. THE CARROI MUSEUM OF ARTS AND HISTORY

Located in the General Estates House (N° 44), where the future king Charles VII is supposed to have held the General Estates Assembly in 1428, the Museum has notably in its collection the Cape of Saint Mexme, made from Islamic embroidered cloth dating from the eleventh century, and a portrait of the sixteenth century writer Rabelais by Delacroix. Temporary exhibitions of contemporary art are often held. Continuing along towards the Saint Maurice Church, one can see the remarkable Hôtel du Gouverneur, from the seventeenth century at N° 48; the Palais de Baillage, or Courthouse from the fifteenth century at N° 73, and opposite, the Tallien House, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at N° 58.

11. PLACE AND CHURCH OF SAINT MAURICE

The neighbourhood parish church of Saint Maurice, built between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, gives a full panorama of French religious architecture from Romanesque and Gothic to some Renaissance décor.

Saint Maurice Square is surrounded by medieval houses. The double staircase leading down to it and the fountain at the top date from the nineteenth century.

12. RUE HAUTE-SAINT-MAURICE

Beyond the Place Saint Maurice, the street is lined with manor houses of noble families. Particularly remarkable is the Maîtrise des Eaux et Forêts (Management of Waterways and Forests) dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and notably its curious turret, squared street side and round facing the inner courtyard. Opposite, the Hôtel Bodard de la Jacopière, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, is under restoration and will be home to a Centre for International Heritage.

13. THE OLD MARKET

A fortified entryway closed this west end of the former walled town, and the defences continued up to the castle and the Moulin Tower, which still rises up on the rocky slope.



3

14. QUAI CHARLES VII

The quais or docks along the river replaced the medieval defensive walls in the 1820's and now serve as an embankment against flooding, and a major thoroughfare of the town. The embankment is shaded by remarkable plane trees along the river, and street side, are buildings and manor houses with lovely stone facades from the nineteenth century.

15. BRIDGE AND QUAI DANTON

The bridge over the river honours the memory of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Duchess of Aquitaine and Queen of England in the twelfth century, who, with her husband King Henry II Plantagenet, made Chinon and its castle one of their favourite residences.

Crossing the bridge will allow the visitor to admire the view of the Vienne River, which is subject to great differences in depth according to the seasons and to discover from the Quai Danton a stunning panorama of the castle and the town lying at its foot.

16. ISLET OF TOURS

The name of this little island comes from the rights over the Vienne River by the Archbishop of Tours.

Access to it can be found in the middle of the bridge. It is a haven of green space and invites nature walks and relaxation along the river, in the middle of gardens, and under the deep shade of its trees. Looking carefully, traces of beavers or the sudden flight of wild ducks can be observed, and to the north, exceptional views of the old town and the castle.

17. PLACE VICTOIRE

Opposite the bridge was the principal entry into the former fortified town, framed by two defensive towers, and allowed access to the medieval city, which, wedged between the city walls and the rocky slope with the castle up top, was in the past an intensely busy and crowded place. The Victory Square was formerly occupied by a fourteenth century chapel which was abandoned at the Revolution. Following many complaints by surrounding neighbours, the chapel was demolished in order to give easier and better access to the rue de Commerce and the Place du Marché, or Market Square, the now principal commercial and shopping district around Place General de Gaulle.



1. View from the elevated passageway- Elevator

2. The statue of the Sacred Heart

3. Saint Radegonde Chapel



CAVE DWELLINGS AND NATURE WALK

18. TOWN HALL

The Neoclassical Town Hall was built in the mid nineteenth century to replace the wooden medieval covered market. During opening hours, one can enter and view the work by contemporary artist Erik Dietman, le Hall d'honneur. Temporary exhibitions are often organized in the gallery upstairs.

19. ELEVATED PASSAGEWAY – ELEVATOR

This link between the upper and lower town was built in view of respecting the surrounding landscape and was inaugurated in 2008. The elevated passage affords the visitor two spectacular views of the town. Slate rooves are punctuated by the pointed tops of staircase towers and turrets and dominated by church steeples and bell towers.

20. SAINT MARTIN HILLSIDE DISTRICT

The church that gives its name to this portion of the rocky hillside and upper town was originally founded around the year 410 by Saint Brice, who succeeded Saint Martin as Bishop of Tours. Disaffected in the eighteenth century, the building was converted into a home, but one can still see the rounded apse to the east. A little farther, one has a stunning view of the local Chinon landscape as well as of the valley. The line of plane trees marks the course of the river, with just further on the other side, the little suburb of Saint Jacques and its modern structures. Beyond one can glimpse the flood plain and the little hamlet of Parilly at the foot of the rocky slope on the south bank.



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21. THE STATUE OF THE SACRED HEART

This sculpture of a blessing Christ, by Paul Richon, was inaugurated in 1941 to express gratitude for the protection afforded Chinon during the Second World War. Its presence in Chinon is thanks to the priest here at the time, Vivien, who kept a photo of the Christ of Rio de Janeiro on his desk, which seems to have inspired the idea. The sculpture, which is on private property, is not accessible to the public.

22. SAINT RADEGONDE HILLSIDE DISTRICT

The rocky slope of the upper hillside, lined with cave dwellings but now deserted, were still inhabited and provided a real village life until the mid-twentieth century. No less than twenty families lived in them. The little neighbourhood had its own customs and its own important figures, including a self-proclaimed mayor, as well as its own café-cabaret called the “Sniffing Flea”. One can see below the neighbourhood known as the “Courances”: the little houses and buildings with slate rooves date from the 1950’s and 1960’s. The train tracks form an embankment for the flood plain on the other side.

23. SAINT RADEGONDE CHAPEL

This site was once the cell of the hermit John in the sixth century. Saint Radegonde is supposed to have come here to seek his counsel, and this event gives the chapel its name. The nave aisle of the chapel, carved directly into the rockface, has medieval wall paintings, including the renowned Royal Hunt, or Chasse Royale, dating from the twelfth century, and seems to represent the royal Plantagenet family on horseback. In the interior, a well, dug deep into the rock, is probably the ancient origin of the site, and is still visible today.

24. SCULPTURED PORTRAITS

A few meters away from the Chapel, one can find sculptured portraits of certain inhabitants of this little hillside suburb. The one representing a man with a moustache is Anatole Fièvre, a famed resident of the neighbourhood and self-proclaimed “mayor” of it, from the mid-twentieth century.



25. COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SAINT MEXME

This was the principal religious edifice in Chinon until the eastern portion caved in in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today, it is a cultural centre. The nave, that dates back to the year 1000, now houses a small wooden theatre and is used for performances and concerts during the summer months. The westwork, or Romanesque façade with two towers, contains a wealth of medieval wall paintings, and in 2006 was graced with contemporary stained-glass windows following the designs of Olivier Debré; it is also used for exhibitions.

26. CHAVIGNY HOUSE

Remarkable for its corner tower and its fake defensive machicolations, and dating from the fifteenth century, the Hôtel de Chavigny was probably the home of the Head Canon of the chapter of the Collegiate Church of Saint Mexme. This is a disputed honour, as it is rivalled by another remarkable home nearby, in the rue Hoche, N° 20.

27. PLACE AND STATUE OF JOAN OF ARC

The Joan of Arc Square was created in the nineteenth century to hold fairs and livestock markets, and it still has a weekly market on Thursdays. The Square is located in the former fields of Saint Mexme, where Joan of Arc is supposed to have trained for war in 1429. The equestrian statue of her, shown with dynamic audaciousness, is the work of Jules Roulleau in 1893.

28. HOUSES CIRCA 1900

The neighbourhood found between the Gendarmerie and the train station, created at the end of the nineteenth century, would only be fully developed in the twentieth. The houses on the south side of rue 11 Novembre, on leaving Joan of Arc Square, have each been given a different décor, picturesque and colourful, while retaining the same interior layout, having all been built around 1900.



1. Collegiate Church of Saint Mexme

2. Houses circa 1900

3. Promenade Doctors Mattraits

29. PROMENADE DOCTORS MATTRAITS

The remaining vestige of a public garden that once included the Joan of Arc Square, this is a lovely place to stroll or have a picnic on the banks of the river, under the shade of hundred-year-old trees that have recently been awarded the label of a “Remarkable Tree Ensemble”. There is a large flea market here on the third Sunday of every month.

30. JEU DE PAUME - REAL TENNIS COURT

Ancestor of lawn tennis, real tennis was one of the most popular sports in France and in Europe through the seventeenth century, but the special buildings dedicated specifically to this sport have almost all disappeared. The one in Chinon dates back to the end of the sixteenth century. It was listed a Historical Monument and is currently undergoing restoration in order to make it an active court again.

31. STATUE OF RABELAIS

This statue by Emile Hebert in 1882, welcomes the visitor to the town at its entry. Rabelais is represented seated, dressed as a doctor, pen in hand. On the base of the statue are bas-reliefs that show the multiple facets of his talents: doctor, writer, and humanist.

« IN CHINON, EVERY STREET CORNER RESEMBLES A PAINTING FROM THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY... »

Henri Guerlin, la Touraine, 1911

The official title of «**Town or Province of Art and History**» is awarded by the Minister of Culture and according to its acceptance by the National Council of Towns or Provinces of Art and History. It is granted to further the understanding of the wealth of architectural heritage and its promotion, recognition and appreciation.

Heritage Services - Led by a Head of Heritage Services, it organizes different events and documents in order to promote the history and heritage for all ages, and for tourists, with professional certified guides.

Nearby

Other places with the title « Town or Province of Art and History » : Tours, Loches, Saumur Vendôme, Blois, Orléans, Bourges, Loire Touraine, Loire Val d'Aubois, Vallée du Cher et du Romorantinais.

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