

Esprit des lieux – sacred sites of FRIBOURG REGION



1 : Loreto chapel - © @thomodernleper Thomas Christians

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1 ESTAVAYER-LE-LAC PAYERNE ET REGION

1.1 THE ABBEY CHURCH - PAYERNE

The magnificent Payerne Abbey is the largest Romanesque church in Switzerland. The frescoes, capitals, the stature of the archways, and the "blondness" of the stones create a unique atmosphere.

As it is often the case, the first monastery, built in around 950 AD, was constructed on the walls of Carolingian buildings. Becoming a Cluniac priory (obeying the rule of St. Benedict of the Cluny monastery in Burgundy), it underwent rich development. It was raised to the rank of abbey in the 15th century, under the authority of the House of Savoy.

With the Reformation and the arrival of the Bernese, the monks were driven out and the convent buildings were used for various non-religious purposes: granary, warehouse, workshop, barracks, foundry, archives room and gymnastics room. The abbey, "the most spectacular vaulted religious building in Switzerland", became a historic monument in the late 19th century.

It is a Romanesque building supplemented with numerous late Gothic elements, and houses frescoes from the 11th and 12th centuries. Magnificent capitals adorn the columns. The admirable clarity of the interior, rare for Gothic monuments, derives from the windows in the side aisles and the colour of the stones used. The high pillars give a majestic volume to the ensemble.

The abbey is constantly renovated and maintained. Archaeological digs revealed the presence of a major cemetery (several hundred tombs) under its floor.

Since 1870, some of the convent buildings have been occupied by the Musée de Payerne, dedicated to fine arts. The abbey forms a beautiful architectural ensemble alongside the neighbouring parish church, the 16th century town hall and the Bernese castle.

It has been discovered that the famous "will of queen Berthe", naming her as the founder of Payerne, is in fact a fake, created by monks. These papers allowed the monks to grant themselves more rights than they actually possessed.

1.2 THE CHAPEL OF THE DOMINICANS - ESTAVAYER-LE-LAC

Built in 1319, the Chapel of the Dominican Sisters has undergone several changes over the centuries, the most recent major restoration beginning in 1972 and concluding in 1975. Its rich heritage and the tranquillity of the location place invite discovery and contemplation.

Situated not many metres from the Dominican Sisters' Gate – the southern entrance to the town – the chapel harbours a number of little treasures, amongst them Raymond Mirande's tabernacle, ancient stained glass windows blending with the modern one created by Bernard Schorderet in the 1970s, and Jean-Pierre Demierre's ambo. The highlight of the patrimony, however, is a triptych (three hinged panels that can be folded shut): Estavayer's famous reredos was created by Hans Geiler, a celebrated artist of the region, in 1521. In spite of the long history evinced by these works, the chapel remains a living place of worship, as witnessed by the daily presence of the sisters, who come to pray in the midst of the ancient stones (blue and yellow Molière shell sandstone and Hauterive limestone) constituting the church, the altar and the tabernacle.

1.3 ROMAN MUSEUM – VALLON

The Roman Museum in Vallon features must-see mosaics and a large collection of statuettes depicting the gods.

Archaeological digs carried out at this rich dwelling have produced over 20 divinities in bronze and lead, both intact and broken: Apollo, Diana, Mercury, Mars, Hercules, Isis and Harpocrates, as well as sacred animals: a three-horned bull, bear, cockerel, goat and tortoise. Most were gathered in the room with the mosaic of Bacchus and Ariane.

They represented various belief systems: Celtic, Greco-Roman and Egyptian. Domestic divinities were particularly pampered. The museum has a reconstruction of a domestic chapel where the house's protective gods and its inhabitants are gathered together. Every rich dwelling had its own domestic altar; the gods that were honoured were particular to each family.

Egyptian gods have been found in Vallon. They include Harpocrates, lying near to his mother Isis. His statuette has his finger to his mouth: he is the god of silence and the protector of young children.

1.4 THE TOUR DE LA MOLIÈRE – L'ŒIL DE L'HELVÉTIE - ESTAVAYER-PAYERNE

Tour de la Molière – L'oeil de l'Helvétie

From the heights of the “Oculus Helvetiae” in the footsteps of the Romans

Setting off from the car park of the Vita exercise trail, we take the path descending alongside the tree cover and join the footpath. We cross the road and follow the stream on our right. Leaving the wood, we head left: the little rise alongside the quarry helps warm the calf muscles in readiness for what is to come. At the following junctions we keep to the path, bearing left. A second ascent warms the muscles before we continue bearing left and descending slightly while we catch our breath. We follow this path until we find ourselves apparently unable to continue at the edge of an open field. We cross the latter, carrying straight on to reach the copse, where we find our path and, at the next junction, join the waymarked footpath. Via a path by the name of Reine Berthe, we head towards the Tour de la Molière, also known as the Oeil de l'Helvétie or Eye of Helvetia. It can be visited (call 079 316 62 13 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. for the access code). It's an ideal sheltered spot for a picnic. We then skirt the wood and, at the end of the path, fork left and go down a little steep path that leads to Franex. Franex Chapel comes with its own history: an interpretation panel 100m from the chapel reveals all. We continue heading towards Nuvilly until we reach Moulin (altitude point 547). We then take the footpath to our left before the Petite Glâne stream, which we follow as far as Granges-de-Vesin. We pass through the village, following the road for a few hundred metres before returning to the wood via the footpath on our right. We end our walk via the Vita trail and return to the car park.

1.5 FOYER NOTRE-DAME DE TOURS - COUSSET

This hostel, a centre of spiritual life, neighbours a pilgrimage site that has been visited since the 15th century, the chapel of Notre-Dame de Tours.

Accommodation in dormitories.

2 FRIBOURG TOURISME

2.1 CATHÉDRALE ST-NICHOLAS - FRIBOURG

A gem of gothic architecture, Fribourg cathedral boasts exceptional decoration and sacred artistic treasures: stalls, stained glass windows, sculptured groups, etc.

Dominating the river Sarine, Fribourg cathedral is dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra. It is built from molasse stone and has three naves. The 76-metre-high tower was the highest building in Switzerland until the 19th century.

The building, in the Gothic style, has decoration that was completed in the Baroque period. The side chapels have always housed altars; there were over 20 of them in the 17th century.

The main doorway is adorned with bas-relief (14th century) representing the Last Judgement: Christ directs men to paradise or hell (where horrible creatures await). Saints, angels and prophets surround the scene, while at the centre, Saint Nicholas watches over his town.

The stained-glass windows create a unique atmosphere. The windows (eight in the nave and five in the choir: 240 m²) were created by the Polish artist Jozef Mehoffer between 1895 and 1936 and form an exemplary Art Nouveau ensemble. They represent rich compositions in which the characters blend into intensely coloured nature. The non-figurative stained glass of the high windows in the nave and the rose window in the tower are the work of Frenchman Alfred Manessier (1980s).

There is a very special atmosphere in the Saint-Sépulcre chapel . Thirteen life-sized molasse statues (1433) represent Christ being laid in his tomb. Manessier created the stained-glass windows here: The Night of Good Friday and Easter Morning.

The romantic organ (1834) is the work of local organ builder Aloys Mooser, whose workshop was in the neighbouring Gottéron valley but whose reputation was international.

People transfixed by their mobile phones: 21st century man is present in the sculpture on the cathedral's southern doorway. Volger Kurz took advantage of the 2016 restoration to add this contemporary touch to a scene cut from molasse in 1330.

2.2 HAUTERIVE ABBEY – HAUTERIVE

Hauterive Abbey is the oldest working Romanesque abbey. It is possible to visit the Romanesque church with its Gothic choir. Exceptional stalls provide seating for the monks.

The abbey's history began in 1131, at an isolated site, when a local nobleman donated his lands to build a monastery. The neighbouring feudal lords continued these donations, and the institution rapidly found itself with barns, vineyards, pastures and fields. At the mercy of the vagaries of religious and political life, the abbey experienced periods of prosperity and decline. In 1578, several buildings were destroyed by fire. The baroque convent buildings were rebuilt in the 18th century.

The government closed the monastery in 1848. The premises then became an agricultural school, followed by a teacher training college. The monastery was re-established in 1939 and is today home to around 20 Cistercian monks.

The church, built between 1150 and 1160, is a fine example of medieval architecture. It has a Romanesque structure and a Gothic choir (14th century). The 34 backrests of the 15th century oak stalls were sculpted by Antoine de Peney, alternating depictions of prophets and the apostles. Gothic stained-glass windows are particularly recognisable in the choir. The Frenchmen Jean Bazaine and Alfred Manessier designed the non-figurative contemporary windows. The abbey shop occupies magnificent vaulted premises.

Around 30 stone cutters worked on the decoration of the cloister. The Romanesque parts date from the foundation of the abbey, while the Gothic parts date from a later reconstruction. The cloister surrounds an attractive contemporary geometric garden. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the abbey was home to a major scriptorium (a workshop where monastic scribes worked before the invention of the printing press).

The name of the location (haut = high, rive = river bank) is a reminder that the abbey was built within a large meander of the Sarine, cut into an imposing cliff.

2.3 THE FRANCISCAN CHURCH AND MONASTERY – FRIBOURG

The Cordeliers church possesses some true masterpieces, including Gothic altarpieces, stalls, paintings and sculptures. Everything has been recently restored.

The first construction of the Cordeliers church dates from 1281, when the Franciscans of Basel set up home in Fribourg to found a monastery, which quickly gained in importance. From the 15th century onwards, this vast church hosted the assemblies of the town's middle classes. Distinguished guests were often housed at the convent.

During this prosperous period, the church was enriched with works of art, including three renowned altarpieces. The altarpiece of the high altar is the largest medieval painting in Switzerland. Four painted carnations have been discovered, resembling an artist's signature. But this symbol is often found on paintings from the period and may be used as a sign that the painter belonged to a trade association.

The incomplete altarpiece of Saint Anthony is signed and dated: Hans Fries, 1506. The "Furno" altarpiece, a true gem from 1513, is a gilded triptych in relief.

The current nave was rebuilt in the 18th century. Look up to admire this high, light-filled aisle: late baroque trompe-l'oeil decoration stands alongside Gothic keystones. In the cloisters, you will discover 15th century paintings depicting six scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary, from around 1440, by Peter Maggenberg.

Cordelier is the name given to Franciscans, the monastic order whose members draw their inspiration from Saint Francis of Assisi (12th-13th century). In Fribourg, the monastery is now too large for the community. Some of the floors are used as student accommodation, and the cellars have been converted to preserve the archives in optimum conditions.

The Cordeliers are so-called because of the large "corde" or rope with three knots that they wear tied around their waist over their brown or grey habit. It symbolises their ideal of poverty.

2.4 CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE – FRIBOURG

The church of St. Michael's College is a masterpiece in the rococo style. It is home to remarkable frescoes, altars and paintings.

Built in late Gothic style, the church of the St. Michael's College was transformed in the 18th century into a rococo gem. The architect Franz Rabaliatti transformed the openings and vaults, while Giuseppe Albuzzi created an opulent stucco decoration.

Several frescoes describe the battle of good versus evil. Recognisable scenes include the archangel Saint Michel bringing down Lucifer (by Gottfried Locher, at the high altar), the fight between the good and bad angels, and Adam and Eve thrown out of paradise. Around ten Swiss marble varieties have been used for the altars in the chapels of the side aisles. An unusual organ occupies the gallery, the result of the merging in 1954 of two historical instruments, one assembled here in 1764, the other, built in 1826, from Hauterive Abbey. The St. Michael's church is currently used mainly as a concert hall.

In order for the young people of Fribourg to be able to study in the town, the council asked the Jesuits (a religious order that is active in education) for help. Pierre Canisius arrived in Fribourg in 1580. He had already worked intensely as a theologian, adviser, preacher and writer. The first stone of the St. Michael's College was laid in 1585, and the academy quickly gained in importance. Pierre Canisius was highly influential. After his death he was canonised (recognised as a saint) and his body lies beneath the church altar. Over time, the College has been enriched with several buildings, but the original plans have been conserved. You can take a walk in the large square in front of the church and in the garden of the interior courtyard adorned with a Madonna and Child escorted by cherubs, created by J.-F. Reyff.

The Valette festival, whose origins lie in a Jesuit tradition, has marked the end of the academic year at the St. Michael's College since 1883. As early as the 19th century, people complained about the commotion, which "disturbed the sleep of the middle classes".

2.5 LORETO CHAPEL – FRIBOURG

The belvedere of this baroque-style sanctuary built by Jean-François Reyff in 1648 offers the most beautiful view of Fribourg's old town.

A small, elegant cube, the Loreto chapel owes its existence to the authorities of the town of Fribourg who decided to build this chapel in order to bring peace to Switzerland in the 16th century, a time of discord.

Larger-than-life molasse statues are positioned on the exterior walls. They represent the four evangelists, two statues of Saint James, Saint Joachim and Saints Anne, Cléopée and Salomé. A starry dome, wooden railings and a statue of Our Lady of Loreto adorn the interior.

This chapel is one of the most successful creations of Jean-François Reyff, the versatile artist from Fribourg who was a sculptor, architect and fortifications engineer. His Virgin Marys are recognisable by their pensive, gentle faces.

The esplanade around the chapel offers an exceptional glimpse of the districts and bridges of Fribourg. The benches invite contemplation, while the geometric paving – note the paving stones placed on their edges – invites meditation. The path to the Loreto Chapel is tough for less athletic visitors, but you can travel up there by little train in the summer.

There are countless buildings dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto throughout the world. They are so called in reference to the city of Loreto in Italy's Marche region. The city's basilica is home to the Holy House (a perfectly reconstructed Palestinian house) where the Virgin Mary was born.

Legend has it that it was angels who installed the Holy House in Loreto. Fearing the arrival of Muslims in Nazareth, they are said to have transported it to Loreto in a single night. In memory of this episode, aviators have adopted the Virgin of Loreto as their protector.

2.6 NOTRE DAME DE LA ROUTE – VILLARS-SUR-GLANE

With its unique natural location, the Domaine Notre-Dame de la Route is designed to be a place for healing and discovery.

Located at the doors of Fribourg, with panoramic view on the Alps, the Domaine Notre-Dame de la Route is an ideal place for your seminars, as well as for group and individual stays. Here, you will find serenity and inspiration. Our range of seminar rooms relies on the benefits of the 5 feng shui elements, and they can be reconfigured to suit your needs, so that you can reach your goals in the spirit of serenity and sharing.

2.7 THE MAIGRAUGE CHURCH AND MONASTERY - FRIBOURG

Working abbey of Cistercian nuns (living in cloisters).

Specialities: Home-made jams, home-grown herbal teas, Eau Verte and Eau de Noix liqueurs, rosary beads, dolls, communion wafers.

3 LA GRUYERE TOURISME

3.1 CEMETERY – JAUN

The layout of this cemetery is uniform, but each tomb is different from the other. It is an attractive, rather touching place and not the least bit morbid.

Because he did not have the money to pay for a monument to his grandfather, Walter Cottier sculpted him a wooden cross with his Swiss army knife. Other families were impressed and commissioned crosses from him. The Jaun cemetery committee liked his work and decided that he would be the graveyard's only cross craftsman.

Every monument, nestled under a little wooden shingle roof, is made up of a cross bearing a depiction of Christ, with a back adorned with a sculpted bas-relief. One side depicts the life or activities of the deceased, while the other shows a symbolic element related to the person.

Walter Cottier, a goatherd from a humble background, used his self-taught sculpting skills to produce funerary reliefs between 1948 and his death in 1995. A nature-loving perfectionist, he was never satisfied with his work. The families sometimes provided instructions on the decoration to be engraved. Sometimes they simply put all their trust in the sculptor. This was the case for the cross commissioned for the tomb of a young man. The impoverished workman waited three years before sculpting this field of wheat with poppies. In the foreground, a cob is broken.

The tradition continues today, as several local sculptors have taken up the baton. They place their gouges and chisels at the service of grieving families. Each sculptor's style is identifiable, yet the ensemble retains its coherence.

The music-loving cobbler sits alongside a music-playing angel. A locomotive, construction machinery, a woman with glasses stroking her cat, a cheese maker at work, a knitting basket, a hiker in climbing gear, a computer in a library, a Bernina sewing machine... The lives of the deceased in the Jaun cemetery live on in images.

3.2 WATERFALL – JAUN

The impressive Jaun waterfall gushes out from the rock and cascades into a basin 10 metres below. The location is considered to have a very special telluric energy.

When the winter snows melt, up to 6,000 litres of water have been measured per second. The water streams, stays for a moment in a small basin, and then joins the Jogne river. The area around the waterfall has been equipped for people to visit and rest: paths lead you practically inside the waterfall, where you can feel the suspended droplets. In the evening, the place becomes even more enchanting as the waterfall is illuminated. It is even more magical on a winter's night.

For many years, the origins of the waterfall were unknown. Research has established that it is a karstic resurgence: water penetrates the valley of Les Morteys, around 15 kilometres away, only re-emerging in Jaun after circulating underground for over ten days.

4 REGION MURTENSEE/LAC DE MORAT

4.1 THE ROLLING DISC – MONT-VULLY

Was it Gargantua who tossed the Rolling Disc here? Or the glacier that abandoned it? Or a monster of the lake who spat it out? To confuse matters even further, it is also known as the Agassiz Stone.

Having fallen asleep on Mont Vully, Gargantua's snack was stolen by the devil. When the giant realised what had happened, he threw stones towards Vully. One of them closed off the devil's cave. On full moon nights, this stone rolls aside, allowing you to enter. Those who allow themselves to enter must ensure that they leave by midnight.

Science has its own explanation: it is a glacial boulder that made its journey from Furka to this spot on the back of the Rhône glacier.

The Rolling Disc is also known as the Agassiz Stone in tribute to Jean-Louis Agassiz, who was born at the Môtier vicarage in 1807. This famous palaeontologist proved the existence of glaciations.

5 ROMONT REGION

5.1 STAINED GLASS TRAIL

In the Land of Stained Glass there are numerous opportunities to admire these windows. A walking trail takes you up hill and down dale for a fantastic overview of these colourful marvels.

At the collegiate church of Romont you can admire historic and contemporary windows. The abbey church of La Fille-Dieu bathes in the brilliance of Brian Clarke's stained glass (1996). In Berlens, Jean Bazaine worked on the chapel of Notre-Dame de l'Épine (1989), and Jean Le Moal at the oratory of Saint-Joseph (1987). The sanctuary of Grangettes is home to a magnificent 16th century double-sided calvary, as well as stained glass windows by Anselmo (1984). Finally, the church in Mézières, built in 1939, is lit by panels designed by Yoki (1969).

You can discover more buildings and stained-glass windows by bicycle.

5.2 VITROMUSÉE, SWISS MUSEUM OF STAINED GLASS – ROMONT

This museum dedicated to stained glass, reverse glass painting and all other glass-related arts is housed in a castle. Its collections are like no other in the world.

The 1000-year-old history of stained glass unfolds through the exhibition rooms: archaeological fragments from the 5th century, gems from the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Art Nouveau periods through to modern and contemporary creations. While the oldest stained glass remains anonymous, other pieces bear the signature of renowned workshops or artists. One of these is Marc Chagall.

To explain how a stained glass window is created, the master-glassmaker's tools are positioned in situ in the workshop. Demonstrations and introductory courses are held regularly. Designs, mock-ups, cartoons, sketches and other preparatory works also explain the artist's craft.

One aisle is dedicated to reverse glass painting, the technique that uses shimmers and reflections. We travel from antiquity to modern times, and from Europe to Asia, through various schools.

The art of glass is a constantly evolving world. Technical innovations allow for unique artistic approaches. Fusing, thermoforming, acid work, bonding, sanding, and printing on glass all broaden the experimental field. The collection is constantly enriched with recent works.

The temporary exhibitions allow both precious historic stained glass and works by contemporary artists to be admired. The Stained Glass Museum has a scientific partner, the neighbouring Stained Glass Centre (Vitrocentre). The walls of the 13th century castle stand alongside recent interventions to showcase these masterpieces of light. The collections at the Vitromusée, Swiss Museum of Stained Glass and Contemporary Glass Art are rare and precious.

Special attention is paid to young visitors, who have their own workshop where creative activities are on offer. A hunt for a mischievous ghost leads children on a journey of discovery through the museum and its works.

New Glass-section: Glass is omnipresent in our daily lives, and has been so for millenia. Decorative and functional objects in glass became part of the Vitromusée's collections. The Vitromusée also owns a selection of artworks in glass from the Saint-Prex glassworks, to which has been added recently an important collection of blown, moulded and pressed glass. Nine thematic sections present the history of

glass from antiquity to the 20th century, as well as the important pressed glass production in the 19th century and the products of the Verrerie artistique of Saint-Prex created between 1928 and 1964. A virtual photo gallery, created in collaboration with the Centro Studi del Vetro of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, allows you to discover the internationally acclaimed glasses of the Venetian Seguso Vetri d'Arte studio through historical photographs. Finally, several films produced at the Corning Museum of Glass offer a glimpse into the millennia-old technique of glass blowing.

5.3 SAINT-MARTIN CHURCH - MIDDES

The Saint-Martin church in Torny-le-Petit was built on a hillock with sweeping views. It contains striking contemporary stained-glass windows, both figurative and ornamental.

In the 19th century, a peasant levelling his field was surprised to discover objects in bronze and iron: he had stumbled upon an Iron Age burial mound and was holding ornaments of Etruscan origin. A fragment of marble bearing a Roman inscription allowed archaeologists to conclude that the church was built on the site of a temple dedicated to the god Janus.

The first church in Torny was founded by the bishop of Lausanne in the 9th or 10th century. The current sanctuary was consecrated in 1823 and transformed in the late 19th century. It is dedicated to Saint Martin, the monk and bishop who died in the year 397.

The stained-glass windows are striking, with intense colours reminiscent of Hindu miniatures. In 1989, the Swiss painter Claude Sandoz designed his first windows, inspired by his numerous travels through Asia.

His illustrations of the life of Saint Martin, as told in the Golden Legend, are extraordinary. It is easy to get swept away by the images. Note, for example, all the animals in the first window on the right, particularly the bear: in a deep forest, Saint Martin's donkey has been eaten by a bear; the saint has therefore forced the animal to carry his luggage instead. Can you see the donkey now too? The most famous episode in the life of this bishop is represented in the middle window: the young soldier cut his cloak in half to share with a pauper. In the choir, the eyes of God are fascinating. They express the world of the artist, who uses traditional emblems and leaves his own very personal mark on them.

In the 19th century, the region of Torny-Middes was famous for its witches and wizards. In 1458, a local inhabitant was judged in Lausanne. Suspected of heresy, he was questioned (i.e. tortured) and condemned to burn at the stake.

5.4 MONASTERY NOTRE-DAME DE FATIMA - ORSONNENS

Working abbey of Cistercian monks (living in cloisters). Specialities: spring rolls, Vietnamese specialities.