






HISTORIC TOWNS & VILLAGES Piriac-sur-Mer / Guérande

  20,6 km  1h40


 **Starting point:** Place Paul Vince - Piriac-sur-Mer

 **Circuit ends:** Place du Marché au Bois - Guérande

Type of circuit:

- Route using low-traffic density roads & dedicated cycle paths
- CAP à vélo and Vélocéan cycle routes.

 **Tourist Office Piriac-sur-Mer (44420)**
7 rue des Cap-Horniers
Tel. 02 40 23 51 42 - www.labaule-guerande.com - piriac@bretagne-plein-sud.fr

 **Tourist Office Guérande (44350)**
1 place du Marché au Bois - BP 45304
Tel. 02 40 24 96 71 - www.labaule-guerande.com - guerande@bretagne-plein-sud.fr

Starting at Piriac-sur-Mer, labelled 'Petite cité de caractère' to Guérande labelled 'Ville d'Art et d'Histoire', your route is clearly marked out for you. In the narrow streets of Piriac-sur-Mer, enjoy a leisurely walk around the traditional houses with their brightly painted doors, their hydrangeas cascading in flowers, the heavy stone walls like those to be seen in the neighbouring Brittany. The next natural destination on your travels is the majestic town of Guérande. This masterpiece of Medieval architecture is well worth a visit, be sure to take the time for a stroll around the ramparts.

THINGS TO SEE ALONG THE WAY...

• The collegiate church of Saint-Aubin

Place Saint-Aubin - Guérande - Tel. 02 40 24 96 71 - www.labaule-guerande.com - guerande@bretagne-plein-sud.fr

To better appreciate the strategic position of the town of Guérande in the middle ages the guided tour 'Les hauts de la collégiale' (suitable for visitors as from 10 yrs old), provides the opportunity to go up to the balconies of the collegiate church of Saint-Aubin, an impressive granite monument dating back to Medieval times. The climb up of a hundred or so steps is rewarded by the amazing panoramic view over the peninsula and the salt marshes. Open all year long. Guided tours available in English from May to September, on booking. Contact the Tourist Office of Guérande for details.

• Guérande's ramparts and La Porte Saint-Michel

Place Saint-Jean - Guérande - Tel. 02 40 24 96 71
www.ville-guerande.fr - patrimoine.musee@ville-guerande.fr
A listed historical monument dating back to the middle of the XVth century, La porte Saint-Michel (Saint-Michel's gate) is the main entrance into the fortified town of Guérande. This town gate house with its 2 towers is home from April to October to a temporary exhibition put on by the heritage department of the town of Guérande. Access intra-muros, via la place Saint-Jean. Open : April to October.



• Circuit to discover Guérande's heritage

From the town gates to the churches, from the covered market to the town houses, information panels offer the key facts to appreciate and understand the history of Guérande. Free access to all. Designed for visitors who are unable to follow a complete guided tour, you can nonetheless discover the key events and impressive monuments which have made of this Medieval town what it is to this today. Guided tours available in English from April to October, on booking, contact the Tourist Office of Guérande for details.

• La Maison du Patrimoine (Historic heritage museum)

3 place Henri Vignoboul - Tel. : 02 40 15 59 71 - www.patrimoinepiriac.fr - patrimoinepiriac@yahoo.fr
Come and discover the history and heritage of the village of Piriac-sur-Mer by visiting our permanent exhibition dedicated to the 1950s with a zoom on the school children of the 1900s to current times. Take a trip back into the life and times of this village with its granite dwellings which over time has evolved into a popular tourist seaside resort and pleasure boat marina. Every year we also have on offer temporary exhibitions and films. Open: April to September - contact us for opening times.

TO GO JUST A LITTLE FURTHER...

- **Circuit n°10** 'From the city of salt to the sea shore', **Circuit n°7** 'The circuit of the fishermen', **Circuit n°5** 'From the river Mès to the 'bocage'

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

• The medieval town of Guérande

Even today it is impossible to disassociate the name of Guérande from the harvesting and trade of salt. It was in fact thanks to this precious commodity that the town lived through a golden age in its history at the end of the Middle Ages. Not only does Guérande have the benefit of a strategic position: other than that afforded by its geographical location above and beyond the site of 'production', the salt marshes, but it also has the advantage of direct access to the sea and two major river routes. The town acquired its own large maritime fleet and grew rich thanks to the salt and wine trades.

At stake during the War of Succession of Brittany (1341-1381), Guérande subsequently became the diplomatic capital of the Duchy after the victory of Jean de Montfort. The town is girded by the ramparts flanked by six towers and with openings via four gates. Intra-muros, at the cross roads, stands the impressive collegiate church of Saint-Aubin. Shops and grand town house sprang up around the square of the same name as well as long 'off-shoot' streets containing business and shops such as that of la rue Saint-Michel. The silting up of the port as from the XVth century brought with it the decline of trading here to the benefit of the towns of Le Croisic and Batz-sur-Mer. The dying off of the vineyards and the abolition of the college of Canons during the Revolution further weakened the status of the town.

Upon discovering the town of Guérande Balzac described 'her' as "a town like no other". "Cast on the very edge of the continent, Guérande leads you nowhere, and no man goes to her. Happy to be ignored she concerns herself only with her own troubles". He saw the town as a "magnificent crown jewel of feudalism, proudly set to rule over the seas and the dunes" (...) "her fortifications appear to have been completed just yesterday".

It is perhaps thanks this quiet period in its history that Guérande owes its exceptional state of conservation today which has resulted in the town being awarded the label of 'Ville d'Art et d'Histoire'.



• The salt marshes of Guérande

The emblematic product from Guérande, the 'Fleur de Sel' is famous all around the world and particularly prized in Japan.

Fashioned by man, the salt marshes form a mosaic of shapes and colours ever changing with the seasons. Guided by the 'paludier' (salt worker) the formation of the precious fine crystals of 'Fleur de Sel' followed by that of the coarser 'Gros Sel' is a skilled and subtle alchemy which combines the elements of sea water and sun but also the action of the wind.

Across the centuries the harvest of salt and its trade have not only shaped the landscapes of the area but also the architecture of the paludiers' villages, the ports and fortified towns.

Today the salt marshes occupy an area of almost 2 000 hectares across the Guérande Peninsula. They are divided into two salt producing basins:

- the Batz-Guérande basin which covers an area of almost 1 650 hectares, across the communities of Batz-sur-Mer, Guérande, La Turballe, Le Croisic, Le Pouliguen, the sea water enters via the 'traict' at Le Croisic ;

- The Mès river basin covers approximately 350 hectares across the communities Saint-Molf, Assérac and Mesquer, the sea water enters via the 'traict' at Mesquer.

This unique environment gave its name to the town of Guérande 'Gwenrann' or 'White land' in Breton. The national quality label awarded to the salt marshes of Guérande in 1996, 'Site remarquable du goût' bears witness to the importance of agricultural heritage, culture, sustainable development and gastronomy in the area.

• Piriac-sur-Mer 'Petite cité de caractère'

The picturesque seaside resort of Piriac-sur-Mer is endowed with an ancient architectural heritage. The town centre is in fact home to many old dwellings some of which are over 300 years old but have stood the test of time and the often tumultuous history of the area. This is why in May 2002 Piriac-sur-Mer was awarded the quality label of 'Petite cité de caractère'.

It is across the centuries that this town has constructed its historical heritage: as early as the VIth century Waroch, leader of the Bretons coming from Vannes, disembarked on the coast of Piriac and named this place 'Pen Kiriak' (wicked headland).

Later, in the Xth century, Piriac developed its wine growing activity and exported its wine by sea to 'far off countries such as England! The port of Piriac thus gained notoriety for its salt and wine trades.

But it was in the XVIIIth century that Piriac experienced a considerable economic boom thanks to its fishermen who set sail for Newfoundland to fish for cod. It was indeed at this time that the villages of Kervin and Saint-Sébastien developed.

As for the XIXth century it was marked by the presence of several great writers such as Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet or Gustave Flaubert. Some wrote poetically and with considerable emotion of their times spent here in the village. This same era saw the development of the fish canning industry across the town. This industrial activity only came to an end as late as the 1970s.

The XXth century saw the beginnings of tourism in the town with the development of the fashion of 'bathing in the sea': Piriac-sur-Mer, as a seaside resort, embraced this opportunity and welcomed with open arms its first tourists. ...But even if seaside tourism has taken the upper hand over the fishing activity of the town, Piriac-sur-Mer has nevertheless lost nothing of its charm!



20,6 km 1h40

