

# CITY TOUR

## DIGOIN



Located at the meeting point of four canals and the Loire, the last wild river in Europe, Digoin does not lack heritage assets. From its famous canal-bridge to the astonishing church of Notre-Dame de la Providence, by way of its ceramic district, let yourself be carried away by this multifaceted urban stroll.

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## 1 Place de la Grève

Before being famously known for its earthenware (*faïence*), Digoin had been for centuries one of the most important ports of Burgundy. The city appeared for the first time as "the port of Goin" on a map of France date back to 1563 and 1575. This map was situated on the walls of a cabinet in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. What only remains of the former port is the name grève which comes from the latin word gravis which means beach. Indeed, the port of Digoin was only a beach with a slope where the boats on the Loire river could run aground.

## 2 Dock 713

This building was a former ceramics warehouse located along the Loire river with a breathtaking view of the Canal bridge. It is now called the Dock 713, its style honors its industrial past with photos of the Manufacture of Digoin. This place is now a cultural center which proposes each year an exhibition from June to September and also the place to be each summer to drink cocktails on the quays while appreciating the ballet of the storks and the sunsets.



### 3 Residence of the Mayneauds

The Mayneaud family is from the Charolais region. The most famous members were born in Digoin. The father, **Hughes Mayneaud de Bizefranc** (1715-1781) was the one who saved Digoin from the famine in 1771 by bringing by boat from Orleans 20,000 pounds of rye helping by the lord of la Motte-Saint-Jean who brought 5,000 pounds of rice. You can find the tombstone of Hugues Mayneaud de Bizefranc, at Notre Dame de la Providence in Digoin. His son **Étienne Maynaud Bizefranc de Lavaux** was born in Digoin in 1751. He was appointed interim governor of Saint-Domingue (the Caribbean) on October 14, 1793. General Lavaux played an essential role in the history of the slave insurrection in Saint-Domingue, which led to the first victory of a slave revolt and the creation of the first black republic in history with Haiti on January 1, 1804. He paid the price for having defended the cause of the Blacks of Saint-Domingue. The First Consul Bonaparte dismissed him from all functions in 1801. He will vegetate under the Empire. When the Bourbons returned, he was elected deputy of Saône-et-Loire (french department) from 1820 to 1824, defending progressive ideas. It was during his forced retirement in Saône-et-Loire that he acquired the castle of Cormatin (nearby Cluny) which he had renovated and where he died on May 12, 1828.



Hugues Mayneaud de Bizefranc



### 4 Coat of arms

The coat of arms located on this porch used to be the entrance of the Hostellerie de l'Écu de France. Nowadays it is a private house. Under the coat of arms, we can read the date of 1626, reign of Louis XIII, and also the letters «FM» and «Cl». These may be the initials of the owner and the sculptor. Or as the coat of arms is oval in shape, it may be that of a Lady. The initials would then be those of the young girl and her husband.

At the end of the 19th century, this coat of arms became the emblem of the city without an official approval being found. However, according to old photos (1908), it appeared on the pediment of the Digoin Festival Hall from its construction.

### 5 Bartoli School

This former school is named after a teacher from Digoin who was a great resistance fighter during the Second World War. Titus Bartoli was an activist in the Education union and secretary of the Digoin communist department. He was arrested on July 21, 1941 in Digoin by the French police for distributing leaflets denouncing the German attack on the USSR. This retired teacher was first detained in the Chalon-sur-Saône prison, then interned in the Châteaubriant camp. The Germans shot him in Châteaubriant on October 22, 1941 as a hostage, in reprisal for the murder of the German officer Hotz in Nantes.



## 6 Pont Canal on the Loire

Built from 1832 to 1838, the Canal Bridge of Digoin is one of the only structures allowing the "Canal Latéral à la Loire" to cross the river. It has 11 arches of 16 meters opening and it measures 797 feet. Digoin became a city open to the canal from the end of the 18th century. This masterpiece of civil architecture was recognized as soon as it was completed. This enthusiasm was not shared by the people of Digoin. The Canal Bridge, which was supposed to let the water of the Loire flow through its arches, did not allow a free flow of the river during the flood of 1846. This date became the historical reference flood for the Loire at Digoin. Fortunately, with time, the hatred for this architectural achievement was transformed into love. The Canal Bridge is the key monument in Digoin and the pride of its inhabitants. To use the words of the novelist Roger Semet from Digoin, «*the glory of Digoin rises, like a censer, from the basin of the aqueduct-bridge*».



## 7 Bridge of the Idlers

It is impossible to talk about the canal without mentioning the numerous bridges in Digoin. Digoin's nickname is "the Charolais Island". It is one of the few French towns where you have to cross a bridge to reach the city center. "Le Pont des fainéants" (The Bridge of the Idlers) is the name given to this bridge. It is said that the onlookers used to lean on it to see the barges passing by and the sailors named the *canalous* in full effort.

## 8 Le Canalou

In Digoin, everybody knows what *canalou* means. This word was an unflattering nickname given by the Loire sailors to the canal boatmen. They thought they did not deserve the glorious title of "sailors" because they would spend their days on the towpath pulling boats. Brawls were frequent between the *canalous* and the Loire sailors. This rivalry did not last long since the Loirecrew completely disappeared in the second half of the 19th century and only the *canalous* remained. *Canalous'* lives were unusual, entertained by love and drinking. Roger Semet a writer from Digoin wrote about them in the book *Le Temps des Canalous* which was dedicated to the hard life of the boatmen.

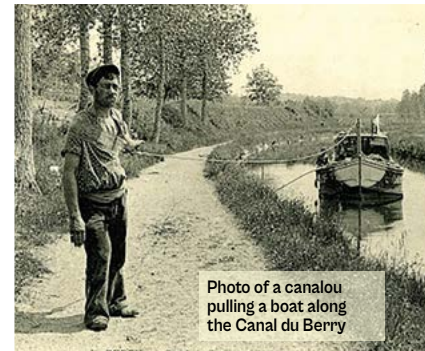
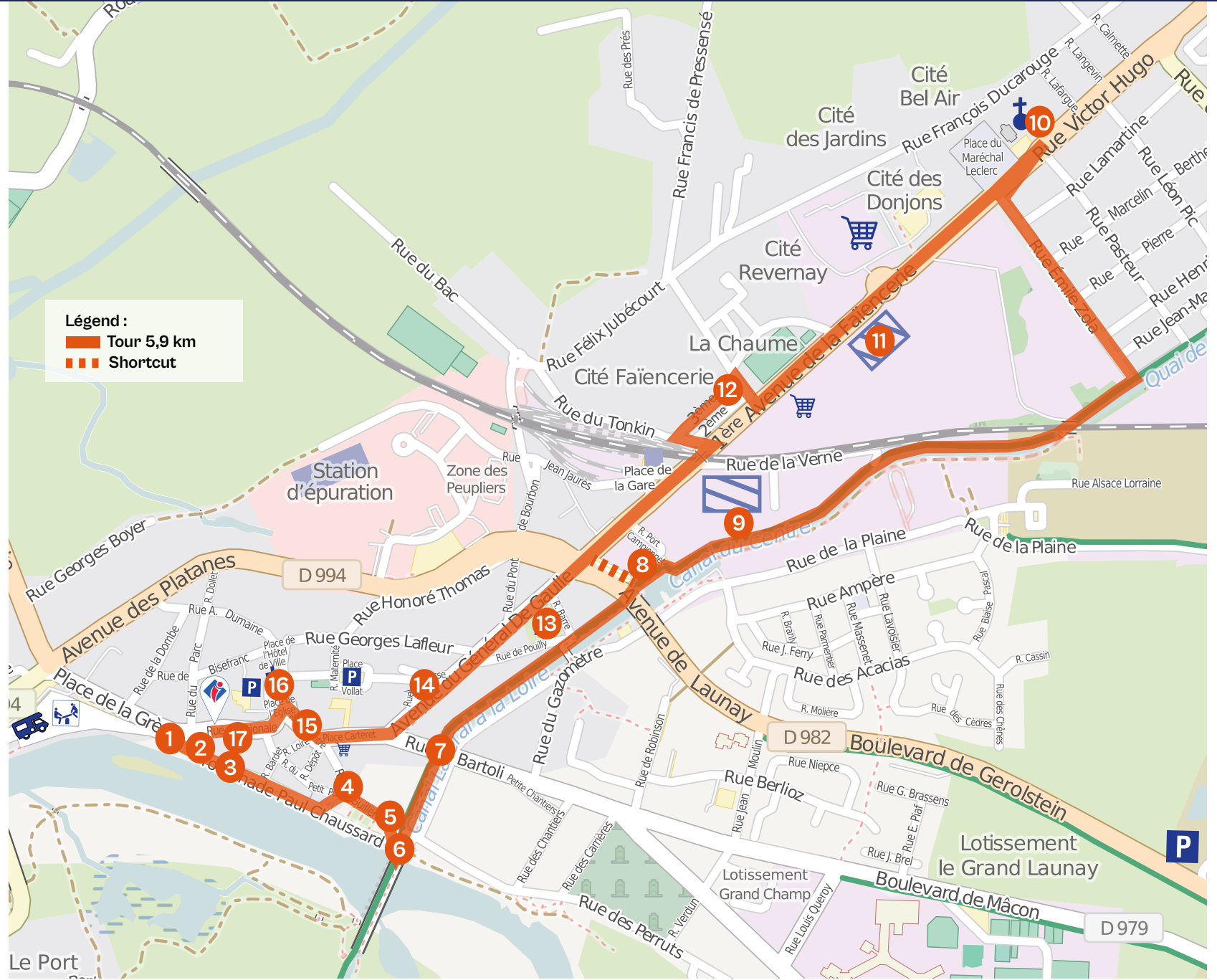


Photo of a canalou pulling a boat along the Canal du Berry







## 10 Sainte-Bernadette Church

Following the installation of ceramic factories, the city of Digoin expanded towards Gueugnon (North-Est). A new district made up of numerous workers' housing estates was created and kept growing during the first decades of the 20th century. The inhabitants of this new neighborhood, called "La Briquette", requested the creation of a new parish, which was established in 1933. In the following years, the construction of a new church was undertaken under the architect Bernard. The inhabitants of the neighborhood contributed greatly to the financing of this new church, including by making small caves of Lourdes in ceramic sold for this purpose. The church is dedicated to Saint Bernadette, canonized in 1933.



## 9 Manufacture

In 1875, a worker from the manufacture de La Broche in Molinet (located a kilometers away) set up a small stoneware and pottery factory next to the train station. Pieces for food and horticultura use were produced in quantity. The company innovated with "*La Digoinite*": a ceramic with lead-free enamel. The Manufacture of Digoin 1875 is today living again thanks to Corinne Jourdain-Gros who bought the place in 2014. Between tradition and modernity, the collection reflects a unique savoir-faire.





## 12 The ceramics district

At the end of the 19th century, this district underwent a major development following the installation of the Sarreguemines faience factory. This working class neighborhood was built to accommodate the families of the workers coming from Sarreguemines. The Briquette district was built around the faience factory and an imposing director's house, as well as engineers' houses.

## 11 Fayencerie of Digoin

In 1871, Alsace and Lorraine became German territories. The Sarreguemines faience factory was therefore impacted. The owners decided to relocate the activity to French territory. They chose Digoin for several reasons :

- A ceramic activity has existed here since 1775 (the Pys faience factory in La Motte-Saint-Jean and then in Digoin in the former Hôtel du Dauphin).
- The site is well served by the railroad and road network but also by the canals.
- The clay quarries necessary to the manufacture are located within a close geographical radius.

As early as 1876, the first buildings were erected and the first faience were produced in the early 1880s. The local workforce was important and very quickly, the Fayencerie of Digoin had more than 1200 employees. The production was very diversified from tableware to utilitarian pieces or mustard pots, without forgetting the decorative objects in slurry (*"barbotine"*: vases, clocks...). The first production was presented at the Universal Exhibition of 1900 in Paris. The variety of the production is such that decades later, the pieces made in Digoin have become highly sought-after nostalgic objects and are part of the current vintage trend in decoration or tableware.

## 13 Place de la République

It is on this square that Digoin turns into the Capital of the Escargot de Bourgogne (Burgundy Snail) ! The Snail Festival takes place in August for three days, it is organized by the Committee of the Place de la République. Every year, people can enjoy the spirit and the warm atmosphere of the festival, and eat snails before going to the fair or the flea market. And for those who are impatient and do not want to wait for the first weekend of August, you can eat snails all year long in local restaurants! You can also look at the parapets on the square which are a perfect early examples of the use of molded cement used during the Art déco.



## 14 Post office

The post office was built in 1931 according to the plans of the engineer Malord from Paray-le-Monial, inspired by the post office of Mâcon (prefecture of the department of Saône-et-Loire). It is a masterpiece of the Art déco style. This monument is unique and remarkable for its spire (tip of a bell tower) while the neighboring church does not have one.



## 15 The sculpted door

In the heart of the city, a door has been sculpted in the 1920's by Mr ROBIN (the former owner of the building) who signed its work under the pseudonym "ROBINO". The four panels represent scenes of Adam and Eve. Above them, there is an allegory of the Loire (probably the mowing of reeds). In pediment, the Quays of the Loire along the Place de la Grève in Digoin are represented. The 10 faces on the upper panels are said to represent relatives of the sculptor.

## 16 Notre-Dame-de-La-Providence Church

In 1864, the city council acknowledged that the size of the former church was no longer suitable and that some parts were in bad condition. The demolition of the former church started on March 5th 1869. The first stone of the new building was blessed by the bishop of Autun in May 1869. The construction of the new church was achieved in 1958 when the right tower was erected. The abbot did not want a building that resembled the other churches built in the region. He wanted a beautiful church for Digoin with its own identity. The project of the charolais architect Della Joggna was chosen. The construction of the building was mostly financed by donation. Notre-Dame de la Providence is remarkable for its alternation of clear limestone and volcanic rock from Volvic. The central tympanum is inspired by *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. We can read the gospel of the patronal feast of Notre-Dame de la Providence: «Do whatever he tells you». A tribute was made in this tympanum by representing Alexandre Dumaine (1895-1974), a nationally renowned chef from Digoin. The capitals (top of columns) on the right describe the main local activities: canal transport, animal husbandry, water jousting, gastronomy. What also makes Notre-Dame de la Providence so special are the storks that have made their nest on the roof of the church since 2001.



## 17 "The cobbled passage"

Everyone in Digoin has already taken this passage but no one really knows why it has been built. According to a local source, this way was used by the men transporting barrels for loading and unloading boats stopping at the docks. Did you notice that this passage is as wide as the waist of a man carrying a barrel? This would explain its narrowness.







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