

Roadbook

CYCLING HOLIDAYS ALONG THE EUROVELO 3

EV3



Belgium

FROM BELGIUM'S LAKE DISTRICT
TO THE GATES OF PARIS

France

We are Mila and Denni! We love exploring cycle routes whenever we can and sharing our tips and itineraries on our blog: unmondeavelo.com. In 2019, we rode the EuroVelo 3 from Norway to Spain. The section between Charleroi and Ver-sur-Launette was an unforgettable part of our biking adventure. We were thrilled to get the chance to ride it again to write this guide. It starts with the striking contrast between Charleroi with its distinctive industrial wastelands and the tranquil ride through the Sambre valley just a few kilometres from the town.

Passing through such lush scenery is what the EuroVelo 3 is all about and what makes it such a brilliant route. Avesnois is the perfect example with its verdant natural arches. Further south, Hirson forest is breathtaking with its variety of tree species and its little waterfall that tells you the river Oise is just ahead. Let the river be your guide as it beckons you to magnificent fortified churches, abbeys and royal castles that are abundant in this region steeped in history.

MILA & DENNI



Mila

Denni

- 3 About the authors
- 4 Introduction
- 6 The map
- 8 **PART 1**
CHARLEROI – MAUBEUGE
- 16 **PART 2**
MAUBEUGE – HIRSON
- 24 **PART 3**
HIRSON – NOYON
- 32 **PART 4**
NOYON – VER-SUR-LAUNETTE
- 40 A final word



From Charleroi to Ver-sur-Launette (near Paris), get away from it all along the EuroVelo 3. Soak up the rich local history pedalling through some of the most scenic countryside in the region guided by rivers or abandoned railway tracks. The route is clearly marked. Just look out for the signs displaying the number 3 with the European flag in the background to be led to ancient ruins, impressive abbeys, local arts and crafts, mind-blowing museums and even traces left behind by former kings and emperors of France.

Young visitors will be spoilt for choice for things to do along the EuroVelo 3 route. From water-sports centres and fun attractions to outdoor games and activities, there's plenty to keep kids occupied.

On a practical note, there are Accueil Vélo® (in France) and Bienvenue Vélo® (in Belgium) accredited facilities all along the EuroVelo 3 route. Campsites, quirky accommodation, guest houses, restaurants and museums are happy to give out handy advice and offer cyclist-friendly services.

Bon Voyage!



1 Charleroi, a changing town

Charleroi is known for its heavy industrial past – which is what makes the town such a unique place to visit. With its recycling plants bordering the Sambre and the impressive wastelands from its former coalfields, the views are mesmerising. A tableau that probably inspired so many **street artists** to display their works all over the town. To learn more about Charleroi's history, head to the **Bois de Cazier** coal mine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Pop into the photography museum while you're there.



📍 AULNE ABBEY

2 Aulne Abbey

Aulne Abbey is an **architectural masterpiece** and major historic monument in the region. The Cistercian monks who lived there were an inventive bunch, building an absolutely fascinating extensive **irrigation system underground**. When the French Revolution broke out, Napoleon and his troops passed through the abbey causing serious damage, made worse by the local villagers who ransacked the place for materials. Over time, the site slowly opened to the public who now get to marvel at the majesty of this abbey church with its Romantic features.



📍 CASTLE IN SOLRE-SUR-SAMBRE



3 Thuin

Perched on a rocky spur, the town of Thuin is packed with surprises. Its main attraction is undoubtedly its magnificent **belfry** which visitors can climb up to the top of and admire the unspoilt views stretching for miles around. Drop off your bikes at the tourist information office and get lost in the town's enchanting **hanging gardens**. Maintained by local residents, there's even a vineyard! Whilst on your stroll, keep a look out for the contemporary artworks that blend into the historic scenery.



4 Tram museum

Just below Thuin, take a journey back in time at the tram museum where you can find cars from different periods. Primarily used nowadays to transport passengers in urban environments, tramways in their golden age carried people and even goods from one town to another. At the museum, enthusiastic volunteers renovate the old tram carriages and get them back to working order. A highlight for visitors is boarding a vintage locomotive and going for a short ride!



5 Biercée Distillery

Just 7 km from Thuin, why not make a minor detour from the EuroVelo 3 and visit the Biercée Distillery? If craft spirits aren't your cup of tea, you can simply go to enjoy the superb surroundings. Otherwise, visit the outbuilding **belonging to a former abbey** dating from the 19th century to learn all about the process of manufacturing the flavours of the different **eaux-de-vie, liqueurs** and other spirits produced by the distillery.



6 Collegiate church of Lobbes

Majestically overlooking the Sambre valley from its rocky spur, the collegiate church in Lobbes is a stunning religious building from **Carolingian times**. Set in the heart of the medieval town, it has survived the centuries with its original structure intact, making it a unique local treasure. While it's quite an arduous ride up to the top, pottering around the site which includes the nearby **Folcuin gardens** offers ample time to get your breath back.

7 Villages around the Sambre

As you progress along the Sambre, leave the route every now and then to discover some little gems in Hainaut. A short pedal away from Labuissière, look out for the wetlands in the **nature reserve**. Or in Merbes-le-Château, make your way to the town centre to admire the onion dome of its church, typical of the region. The **castle in Solre-sur-Sambre** is another local place of interest that's worth a visit. Or stop off at the **marina in Erquelines** for a moment of tranquillity.





TOP PICKS

♥ A

Great!



Just a stone's throw from Aulne Abbey, hop on an **electric boat** departing from Café Lebon for an alternative way to explore the Sambre. ♥ GOZÉE

♥ B

Sleep well!

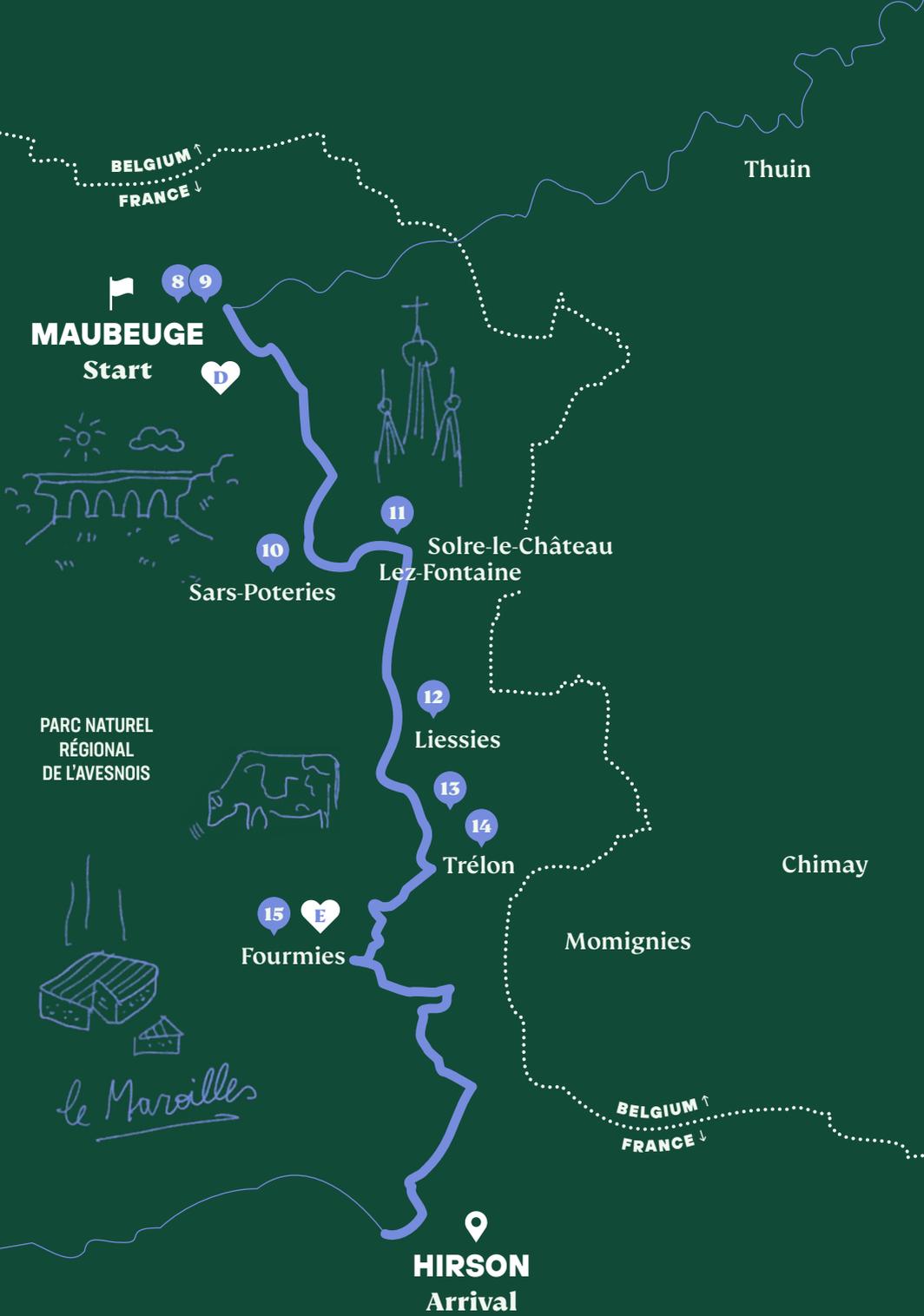
A guest house with tastefully decorated rooms set on the Sambre, **Au Crapaud Charmant** is perfect for a restful retreat. ♥ MERBES-LE-CHÂTEAU

♥ C



Pop into the **Le Spamboux farm shop** and pick up a selection of healthy local products to make a picnic. ♥ LOBBES

MAUBEUGE HIRSON



Nord



Crossing the French border signals your arrival in the Nord department. At Jeumont, stay following the Sambre until you arrive in Maubeuge, a stopping-off point offering a number of interesting buildings to discover. The next leg of your route is a 30-kilometre bucolic ride through woodland and the typical bocage landscape of Avesnois following an old disused railway. Fill your lungs with crisp, fresh air and take the time to stray off your route to explore the traditional villages to be found in the nearby environs.

8 Salle Sthrau, Maubeuge

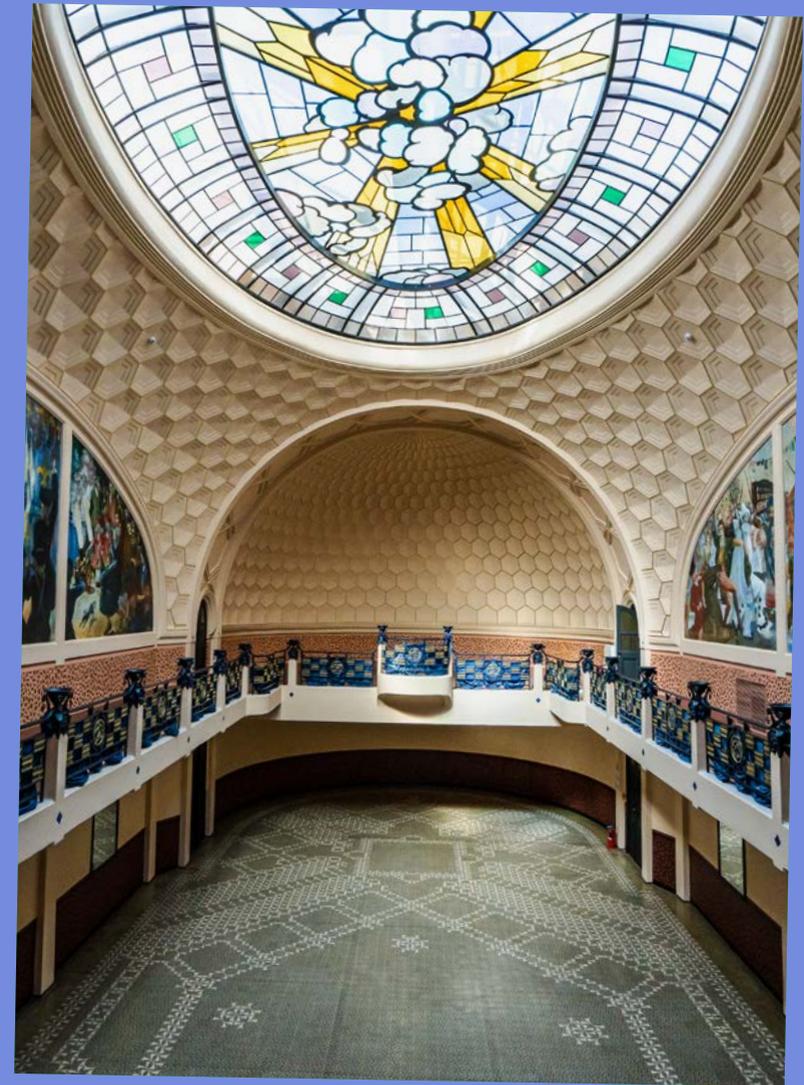
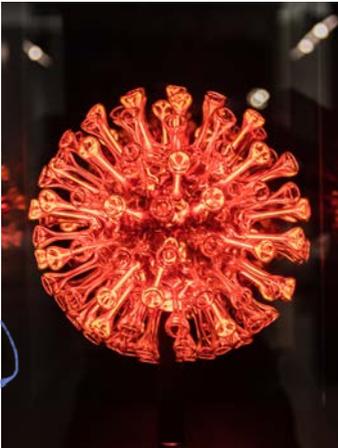
An iconic town in the Avesnois region, Maubeuge was severely damaged during the two world wars. While French modernist architect Lurçat rebuilt the town after the Second World War, the **Salle Sthrau** was designed in the **Art Deco style of the 1920s**. Push open the doors to admire the full splendour of the building. As you peruse the different floors, the spaces become more sublime, all sumptuously decorated and concluding with a splendid ballroom.

9 The ancient ramparts, Maubeuge

Population 29,589, the town of Maubeuge draws visitors mostly for its zoo, the biggest in the Hauts-de-France region. The site is exceptional, all the more given that it is set **within the ancient ramparts** built by French military engineer Vauban in the 17th century. While most of the defensive walls have been removed over the years, there are still traces of them that make for a pleasant walk starting from the imposing Porte de Mons, built out of blue stone and brick.

10 MusVerre in Sars-Poteries

Built in tribute to the glassworkers that made up the community of Sars-Poteries, MusVerre is a **must-see attraction** along this part of the route. There are plenty of **rare and surprising pieces** to see in the temporary and permanent collections. On your visit, you'll also get the chance to see a whole **series of bousillés**, botched pieces transformed into whimsies by the workers during their breaks. More contemporary but equally impressive works are on display in the museum and around the gardens.



9 SALLE STHRAU

11 The blue stone villages

The **greenway route** in Avesnois is one of the most iconic legs of the EuroVelo 3. The greenway passes through forests and bocage countryside with each turn of the pedal. Close to the route, **the charming village of Lez-Fontaine** and its 16th century church are worth a detour. A nod to the region's glassworkers, keep your eyes peeled for the finials made of glass erected on the roofs of houses. **Solre-le-Château** is another delightful place to visit. Its stunning church is topped by an impressive onion dome that leans slightly perilously.



📍 LEZ-FONTAINE

12 The former park of Liessies Abbey

Set in the quaint market town of Liessies, the former grounds of the local abbey invites visitors to take a stroll around its **well-preserved park**, bird observatories and forests. Today, there is barely any trace of the abbey founded in 795 with the exception of the odd outbuilding and its park, built from the late 17th century. A tranquil spot **made for relaxation and contemplation**, it remains a popular green space for walkers and cyclists.

13 ValJoly

Set near the largest lake north of Paris, ValJoly is a **holiday resort** where visitors can spend the day in beautifully preserved surroundings. You can explore the vast lush countryside or partake in the range of **outdoor activities** on offer, including hiking trails, water sports and other fun things for little and big kids to do. Boasting **various types of accommodation**, a restaurant and an indoor water park, you're in the right place to recharge your batteries with friends or family.



14 Glass workshop and museum

After admiring the splendid creations made by artists at MusVerre, learn more about glass and how it is made in Trélon. **The glass workshop and museum** offers an original experience in period buildings. Admire the precision of the glassblowers during one of the **permanent demonstrations**. The exhibition at the museum showcases rare bottles crafted for major brands on these historic premises.

15 The museum of textiles and social life

Set in a former woollen mill that put Fourmies on the map in the 19th century, this museum takes a fascinating look at the local **textiles industry** and the workers who sustained it. Go back in time at the exhibition on textile machines from the 19th and 20th centuries that highlight how the technology developed through the years. You can also find out more about the lives of the men and women who helped to transform Fourmies into **the world capital for the production of worsted wool**.



📍 RELAIS ÉCO-VÉLO



📍 VAL JOLY

♥ TOP PICKS



The **Relais Éco-Vélo** in Ferrière-la-Grande offers bed and board and other practical facilities for cyclists passing through. 📍 **FERRIÈRE-LA-GRANDE**



A traditional cheese from the Nord, **Maroilles** is a popular addition on restaurants menus in the region.



Make a pit stop at the recently renovated La Pointeuse in Fourmies for a refreshing **locally produced beverage**. 📍 **FOURMIES**



HIRSON NOYON



📍 DAS RATHAUS VON CHAUNY

The route now takes you into the depths of the forest as you hug the Oise right from the start of this leg. Follow in the footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson as you track the course of the river which the author of Treasure Island explored in a canoe. As you advance, discover undulating pastoral landscapes with incredible social initiatives, fortified churches in Thiérache and lots of Art Deco features, inextricably linked with the post-war period.



16 Blangy nature reserve

In the heart of the unspoilt Hirson forest, make a slight detour off the EuroVelo 3 route to check out the **delightful waterfall in Blangy**. It's in this lush and idyllic spot that the Oise drops down. The tranquil surroundings make the perfect place to go for a peaceful walk in nature with its pond and the Domaine de Blangy. Both a family-friendly **Accueil Vélo campsite and leisure centre**, you can park your bikes and take part in a host of activities such as kayaking, climbing, archery and even driving a 2CV!



📍 CASCADE DE BLANGY

18 Familistère de Guise

One of a kind, the Familistère (co-operative) in Guise was the result of a large-scale social experiment. It was the brainchild of stove manufacturer Jean-Baptiste André Godin who dedicated his life to **improving the working conditions of his workers**. A place of work but also a place to live, from 1859 social classes were abolished, at least temporarily, within this unique ecosystem. In the middle of the brightly lit interior courtyard, you are transported to the former commotion of this 'social palace' where you can easily forget what year it is as you explore the old lodgings, swimming pool and theatre. To round off your social experiment, sit down for a meal in the staff shops.

17 Saint-Michel Abbey

A short 5-km detour along country lanes leads you to the impressive Saint-Michel Abbey. Over a thousand years old, it hadn't much changed before the French Revolution. The abbey was burned down on several occasions through the centuries, which accounts for the eclectic style of its architecture. The church houses an **early 18th-century (1714) organ built by Jean Boizard**. Visitors can also admire a superb set of murals. Every year, the abbey draws in crowds with its baroque music festival.



📍 FAMILISTÈRE DE GUISE



📍 FORTIFIED CHURCH OF WIMY

19 Guise Castle

With its keep that overlooks the valley, Guise Castle easily catches the eye of cyclists riding along the EuroVelo 3. **This medieval fortification dates from the 12th century.** Reinforced by Vauban during the reign of Louis XIV, you can still make out what remains of its former ramparts and walk through its tunnels. Bombed during the First World War, the fortress became a quarry and dump. Young and enthusiastic volunteers from the heritage camp organisers Club du Vieux Manoir then came along to restore the site which is now open to visitors.

20 Fortified churches in Thiérache

There are plenty of curiosities to discover as you follow the Oise and enjoy its relaxing bucolic scenery. In Ohis, admire the magnificent viaduct before heading to Thiérache and its collection of fortified churches. It was the villagers themselves who **built these fortifications, in the 16th century, to protect their homes from invasions.** You will find magnificent churches in Wimpy, Englancourt and Marly-Gomont, a village made famous by musician and screenwriter Kamini. To conclude your tour here, Beaurain is home to probably the most spectacular church.

21 Maison de Marie-Jeanne

The Maison de Marie-Jeanne in Alaincourt is one of the next main attractions along your route. The life's work of a **passionate collector,** the museum is home to a wide range of objects including toys, clothing, everyday objects and vintage jewels. What makes this place so special is its **extraordinary collection of jewellery and apparel from the 1930s** that are typical of the Art Deco style, which can be seen all over the region. There is an entire area dedicated to Robert Louis **Stevenson** so you can continue your education on the Scottish author and travel writer!

22 Jeanne d'Aboville Museum in La Fère

Founded thanks to the donation of Countess Jeanne d'Aboville to the town, the eponymous museum proudly stands close to the impressive Place d'Armes in La Fère. You almost don't expect to find such an outstanding art collection in a town this small. The paintings from different periods includes **pieces from rare collections** from the Dutch Golden Age, the Northern Renaissance, Italian art and French sumptuous painting from the 18th century.

23 Art Deco in Chauny and Tergnier

Razed during the First World War, Tergnier and Chauny were **rebuilt in the 1920s** based on plans to beautify the towns inspired by the **Art Deco** style. To keep on the trail of Stevenson, go for a potter around these shrines to Art Deco and cross the threshold of buildings to get the full measure of buildings dating from the roaring '20s in France. You can even extend your stay with a solemn visit to the **Museum of the Resistance and Deportation** in Fargniers, just outside Tergnier.



📍 TERGNIER, CANAL





📍 MOULIN DE LUCY



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♥ TOP PICKS



To get into the heart of nature for a weekend, **L'Étang des Sources** in Malzy offers modern, cosy cottages in peaceful surroundings. 📍 MALZY

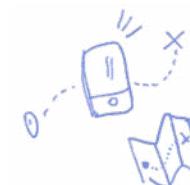


Stunning!

Although the watermill is not open to visitors, **Moulin de Lucy** in Ribemont – a testament to the region's industrial past – can be admired from the outside. 📍 RIBEMONT



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NOYON VER-SUR-LAUNETTE



As you hug the course of the Oise, the river guides you through the state forests of Compiègne, Halatte and Ermenonville – simply follow the EuroVelo 3 signs. While riding the hundred kilometres of this verdant section of the route, cycling tourists are transported through centuries of history that shaped the region. Quaint villages with ancient churches, archaeological sites, abbeys and castles built by kings and emperors of France are never far from view and make the perfect pretext for a break from the saddle.

24 Noyon episcopal district

In Noyon, take a tour of the rich history of this town that witnessed the coronation of two French kings! The **illustrious 12th-century cathedral** is impressive even just by sight from the cycle path. Recognised for its harmonious architecture, it is a **Gothic masterpiece** that you never grow tired of looking at. Just close by, **the Chapitre library is worth a visit**. The wooden building, erected in the early 16th century on stilts, houses over 3,000 tomes including rare publications.



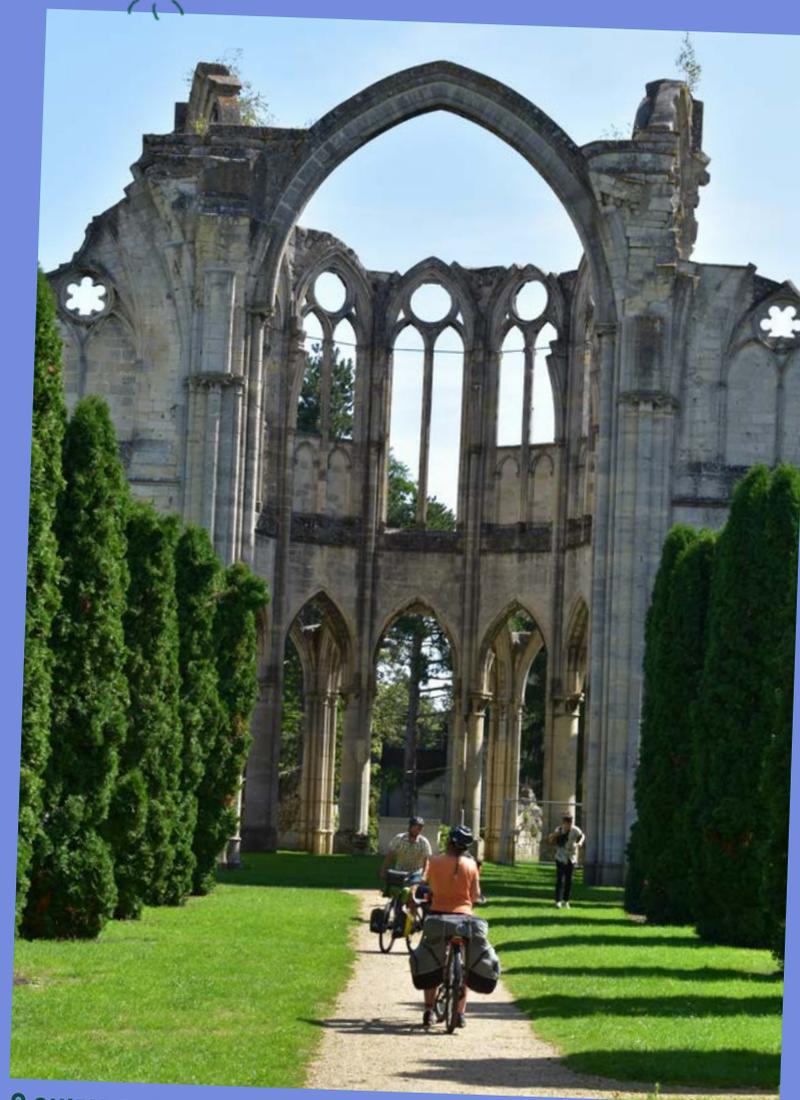
25 Street art in Pont-l'Évêque

While Pont-l'Évêque is already well known by visitors for its **small harbour nestled between the Oise and the Canal du Nord**, it's quite a different reason that led us there. This village of 700 residents has recently become a street art destination, in part **thanks to the majestic face of the artist Hopare** painted on the wall of the post office. Just a few hundred metres from the EuroVelo 3 route, there are a host of artworks to discover, each one just as captivating as the next.



26 Chiry-Ourscamp Abbey

An unmissable stop along the EuroVelo 3, the **Cistercian abbey** in Chiry-Ourscamp houses the ruins of an ancient abbey church, an architectural gem with a fascinating history. The vestiges of this ancient treasure hidden behind a monumental gate are not there because the site was simply abandoned. Founded in the 12th century by the Bishop of Noyon, the abbey was sold after the French Revolution. **The buyer then decided to dismantle a part of the church to create a 'romantic garden'** whose melancholic air still hangs over the place today.



📍 CHIRY-OURSCAMP ABBEY





27 Château de Compiègne

An important site for court life and the exercise of power under Napoleon III, **Château de Compiègne is today the home of three museums.** There you can learn more about the Second Empire in France and, quite unexpectedly, the history of the car with a large collection of automobiles, hippomobiles and **bicycles from yesteryear.** A host of splendid inventions are on display. A delightful way to end your visit is to stroll around the palace's stunning gardens, which have earned **national 'remarkable garden' status,** and the vast Beaux-Monts path, which affords fantastic views of the main château.

28 Moncel Royal Abbey

A short ride away from the lakes in Pontpoint and Verberie, Moncel Royal Abbey is completely different from the other two abbeys set along this section of the EuroVelo 3 route. Founded by **Philip IV of France,** known as Philip the Fair, it was **home to the Poor Clare nuns** who observed extremely strict orders. A sense of serenity came over us at this place with an exhibition that shows the severe way of life these sisters adhere to while observing obedience, chastity and enclosure. Admire the **beautiful architecture of the dormitory and the vaulted cellars.**

29 Senlis

A small town packed with lots to see, Senlis is an unmissable stop along the EuroVelo 3 route. Bursting with history, this **medieval city** has a lively atmosphere thanks to its bustling terraces, craft brewery and restaurants serving modern cuisine. The town centre is ideal for pottering around with its **flowering cobbled lanes, the remains of the ancient royal castle and its Gallic-Roman wall.** Don't miss either the art and archaeology museum, a stone's throw from the **magnificent 12th-century Gothic cathedral.**

SEN LIS

30 Domaine de Chaalis

Step through the gates of the Chaalis estate to discover its many wonders. First make your way to the **majestic abbey church and cloister** before visiting a miraculously preserved architectural gem. Sainte-Marie Chapel is covered in frescoes that have earned it the nickname **'the French Sistine Chapel'.** Conclude your tour with the **beautiful rose garden, awarded 'remarkable garden' status, and the Jacquemart-André Museum,** displaying the collections assembled by the estate's former owner.

31 Jean-Jacques Rousseau Park

It's hard to get your head around the fact that Jean-Jacques Rousseau Park was entirely landscaped by human hand. Designed as an infinite source of inspiration for its visitors, this picturesque park offers a number of **contemplative scenes featuring ruins, caves and lakes,** all artificial. **Classified as a 'sensitive natural area',** this English landscape garden is maintained in full respect of biodiversity protection, all without any indication that the gardeners are there tending to the grounds every day.



📍 DOMAINE DE CHAALIS



📍 PARK NAUTIC DE VERBERIE



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TOP PICKS



In a splendid building just moments from the cathedral, **Hôtel le Cèdre** is more than happy to host cyclists. 📍 NOYON



Don't leave before popping into **pâtisserie and chocolate shop Les Picantins**, known for its traditional confectionery. 📍 COMPIÈGNE



Make a splash at **Park Nautic de Verberie** with its many unusual water-based activities including cable skiing, over-the-water ropes courses and more! 📍 VERBERIE



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This may be the end of this guide, but not the end of your cycling adventures! The EuroVelo 3 route is 5,300 km long, so the possibilities of ways to continue your explorations are endless. How about heading in the direction of Santiago de Compostela by bicycle, with its beautiful stops in Paris, Tours, Bordeaux and Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port?

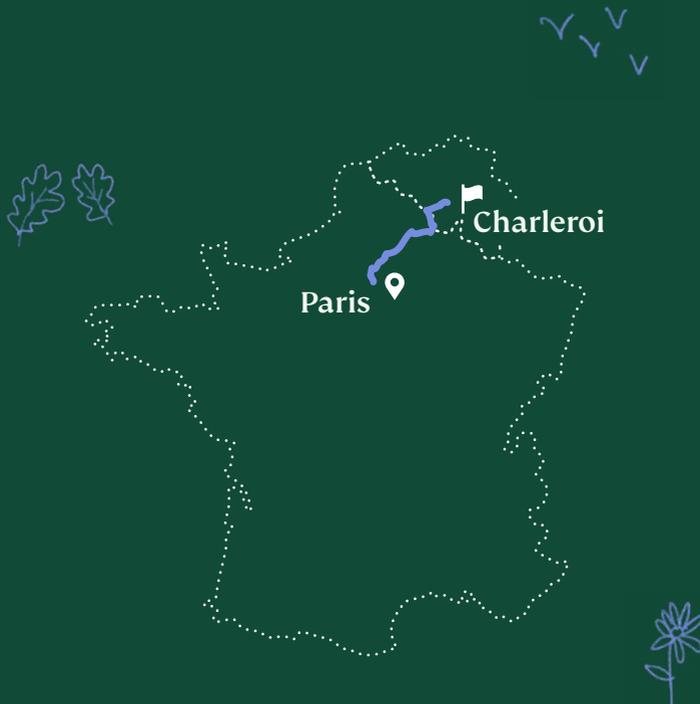


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