

Nantes

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Front cover:
The « Bélem ».
The Pommeraye Passage.

Back cover:
Feydeau island.

"Nantes: perhaps, along with Paris, the only town in France where I have the impression that something worthwhile might happen to me, where certain glances burn with too much fire... where, for me, the rhythm of life is not same as elsewhere, where a spirit of adventure beyond all adventures still inhabits certain beings, Nantes, from where friends can still come to me."

André Breton: 'Nadja'

Nantes, a city of passion

Nantes had always benefited from its advantageous site until the silting up of the Loire and the death of its port. Today, it stakes its future on culture and training. Dislodged from the traditional places where it had previously been confined, art now has become a celebration, brought to the streets, the industrial wastelands and all kinds of unusual sites recapture its heritage and the memories of its estuary. From the old shipyards of the island of Nantes, now superbly redeveloped to house the 'Machines de l'île' – giant pieces of art that offer more than a sly wink to the creations of Jules Verne – to the rest of the quays, framed by the rings of Daniel Buren, the island has been through a metamorphosis recently, offering new sites and adventures for those exploring the city.

1.



The carnival

Henri Lopes,
the 'Seeker of Africa'
"[...] the Thursday and Sunday of
mid-Lent are the only two days of
the year [where the people of
Nantes] celebrate their black roots
and history. On these two nights
[...] Nantes pours into the street
and pounds the paving stones
with the rhythm of the tom-tom.
Only dancing and trifling matter.
The middle classes abandon their
morals on orders."

2.





3.

1.
The Nantes Carnival, 2002.

2.
The walking elephant
on the island of Nantes.

3.
Landing of a rocket in
front of Nantes cathedral.

4.
The Nantes Carnival, 2002.

4.

Nantes : a certain art of living

From celebrations...

The boats no longer arrive in Nantes. Nostalgia is all that remains of its maritime past, and its taste of the open seas. From cultural events to popular meetings, Nantes provides an escape from the day-to-day world. Its 'Festival of the Three Continents', devoted to the cinema, is an authentic opening onto the world. For nearly 30 years, the festival's creators, the Jalladeau brothers, have searched high and low across Africa, Asia and South America to discover new talents that reflect the simplicity and broad appeal which characterise this unique event.

Nantes also hosts its 'Crazy Day', a classical music festival extremely popular with the people of Nantes and the inspiration for neighbouring cities and great foreign ports.

Then there is the famous Nantes carnival. These street theatre shows – topped by the giant animated puppets – are full of imagination, poetry and splendour. One of the latest of these gigantic animals is the extraordinary elephant on the island of Nantes, designed by François Dalarozière and Pierre Oréface. Its movements around the city are something to behold of all Nantes inhabitants.



'The Shape of a Town' by Julien Gracq

"There is, however, in the Nantes of today, a line of fracture, along the length of which the strong cohesion of the urban cake [...] breaks, and inserts into its substance a poorly healed scar, a gap that life has not completely clogged: the double bed cradled in the arms of the Loire, shared with the old Feydeau Island. "[...] in Nantes, with the too broad central opening that replaced the cradling arms of the river, the city has not gain in strangeness, it has lost its balance. Over taxation, in the spirit, from its old face to its current aspect, so natural, so at ease in almost all the districts of the city, no longer operate. The out-of-date image has been scrambled; it would be impossible for me today, even roughly, to indicate the site of the old bridges."

Ravaged Nantes

The Cours des Cinquante-Otages recalls a tragic episode from the war: the death in 1941 of Feldkommandant Hotz, paid in reprisals by that of 48 hostages (including 44 Communists). An exorbitant price in blood for the city, afterwards promoted as a 'companion of the Liberation' by General de Gaulle. In memory of those executed, a sober and beautiful monument closes the Cours.

Nantes suffered considerably in the continuous bombardments between 1940 and 1944. However, it was, in fact, the American air raids of the September 16th and 23rd, 1943 that would be written in the darkest pages of its history. To the 1,500 listed dead, could be added the destruction that struck the whole city and its industrial plants. Bridges cut, ships destroyed, 2,000 buildings demolished, 6,000 unusable and 70,000 Nantes-dwellers on the roads, fleeing the burning city.

While the battles continued in Saint-Nazaire, Nantes, disfigured, counted the damage: the Rue du Calvaire and the Place Royal razed to the ground, the prefecture, the Stock Exchange and La Psallette, all severely damaged... From the ravages of the war would be born a new city designed by the architect Michel Roux Spitz. It could have been 'the radiant city' designed by Le Corbusier. But this ambitious scheme was not carried out. Only the eponymous building in Rezé testifies to an urban ideal that is sometimes lacking in Nantes. An example of this is the Place Bretagne, which for Julien Gracq is "[...] today unrecognizable, all concrete and glass at the foot of its skyscraper. It is on this side only [...] that there is a rip that will not heal, made for me by the war in the fabric of the city... ". To the scars of the disappearance of the river and the war, can be added other wounds that have seriously altered the face of Nantes: the death of the port, deindustrialisation and the separation of the Lower Loire region from Brittany, decided by Marshal Pétain's decree in 1941.

2.

1.
The tramway at the foot of the Tour de Bretagne, built in 1976.

2.
The Monument aux Cinquante-Otages, by the Nantes-born sculptor Mazuet.



1.



Confidence Regained

Nantes bandaged its wounds and began to acknowledge its history. Dedicated to the slave trade, ‘the shackles of memory’ testify to its will to lift the veils on the past. Freed from its ghosts, it renewed its bonds with Africa, whose barks covered the quays of the Cheviré port, which became the premier place for international wood trade. It drew on the advantages of its geography and the richness of its traditions of shared passions and the fermenting agents of a joyful sociability. Nothing symbolizes the city better than its tram, its parks, its markets and the canary yellow of its football team. Nantes can be rediscovered in the continuous motion of its tram, the green corridors of its parks, the coloured alleys of its stalls and the lost fluidity of its river.

A Moving City

In 1985, Nantes innovated and chose its tramway. This vehicle is, for Julien Gracq, the emblem of the large modern city. More than just a means of transport, the tram make it possible ‘to knit the city and to redesign its urban fabric’. In the heart of Nantes, it passes along the Cours des Cinquante-Otages, redesigned after the war by Italo Roia. Stitching the scar left by the infilling of the Loire, it linked the two historical centres. The long, green ribbon of its path announces its presence in the outer districts, bringer them closer to the heart of the city.

Nantes, quay of barks and of Africa

“Sipo, niangor and okoumé enchant from their African provenance; the hundreds of piled-up logs demand the attention of the nose as much as the eye. [...] these African barks represent only a quarter of the 210,000 tonnes of wood unloaded each year in Nantes. [...] from the slave trade that it once controlled to the okoumé wood that is felled today, Africans have played an important role in the growth of Nantes rise. After having delivered their cargo of slaves to the Antilles, the boats were ballasted with wood from Brazil and the Caribbean. Campêche, sassafras, gaiac, sapan mahogany and ebony kept the carpenters of Nantes happy. Condemned by iron, then concrete, wood disappeared from the cargoes. It reappeared in Cheviré in 1966 and, since then, has given Nantes first place in the international wood trade.” (‘Géo’ magazine, n° 317, July 2005.)



3. & 4.

1.
Logs of exotic woods.
2.
The greenhouse of
the botanic garden.
3. and 4.
Beds of camellias and
lawns in the Procé Park.
5.
The 'green ribbon'
of the tramway.

Nantes or the passion of the parks...

Incontestably, of all the colours with which one likes to adorn Nantes, the one that suits it best is green. Its 'vegetative heritage' consists of 1,000 hectares out of the 6,523 hectares of the commune, equivalent to 30 square metres per capita, an astonishing figure. As much as the quantity, the diversity of this richness astonishes: nine parks and gardens including a botanic one, 50 kilometres of walkways along the edge of the water and 17 hectares of marsh in the city centre, known as 'Little Amazonia'.

Nantes' hydrographic network has protected its islands of greenery from the appetite of the developers. Louis XV ordered the ships' captains to bring back foreign seeds and plants and the city nourished its passion. To be convinced of this, one only has to visit the Procé Parks, where Breton liked to stroll, or to the botanical garden adjacent to the station. Camellias, rhododendrons, hydrangeas, and magnolias follow the rhythm of the seasons with their fairytale colours.

Nantes hosts the international flower show in the superb Beaujoire park on the banks of the Erdre. A love of nature is also practised on a daily basis in the allotments, within the framework of the city's clubs and societies, thereby sowing the seeds of beautiful friendships.



Practical Information

Getting to Nantes

By Road: A11 from Paris via Le Mans A83 from Bordeaux via Saintes. RN137 from Rennes, RN165 from Brest.

By train: TGV Atlantique from Paris-Montparnasse (2 hours) (French railway helpline: 36 35 from France)
Nantes station: 27, boulevard Stalingrad
Information available at +33 (0)8 92 35 35 35 (€0.40/min + regular call charge)
There are two exits at Nantes station: south and north. The north exit provides access to the tram network.

By plane:

Nantes-Atlantique airport.
Tel.: +33 (0)8 92 56 88 00
(€0.35/min + regular call charge)

Getting Around Nantes:

Allô Taxi Nantes Atlantique

Tel.: +33 (0)2 40 69 22 22

TAN – Nantes public transport network

Tel.: +33 (0)2 40 44 44 44

www.tan.fr

Métroncéane: a single ticket for all public transport on the line between Nantes, Saint-Nazaire and Le Croisic
Shuttle from Nantes to the airport
TAN public transport office

Useful info

Websites:

www.enpaysdelaloire.com

www.loire-atlantique-tourisme.com

www.nantes-tourisme.com

Addresses

Nantes Metropolitan Area Tourist Information Centre – 9 rue des États
44000 Nantes, FRANCE. Tel.: 08 92 46 40 44 (from France)
(€0.35/min + regular call charge)
Tel.: + 33 (0)2 72 64 04 79 (from abroad)

The Nantes tourism website is available all year round to help you plan your trip: accommodation, tickets to attractions, guided tours, shop, tourism passes.

Popular museums

Musée des Beaux-Arts

10, rue Georges Clemenceau

Closed for large-scale extension and renovation works.

During the building works, temporary exhibitions will be held in the Chapelle de l'Oratoire.

Place de l'Oratoire

Tel.: +33 (0)2 51 17 45 42 (except Tuesdays and public holidays) (Due to reopen at the end of 2016)

Château des ducs de Bretagne – Musée d'histoire de Nantes

4, Place Marc Elder, Nantes

Tel.: 08 11 46 46 44 (from France – regular call charge applies)

Tel.: +33 (0)2 51 17 49 48 (from abroad)

How to get there: tram line 1, "Duchesse Anne" stop

Musée Dobrée and Musée archéologique 18, rue Voltaire, Nantes

(Currently closed for renovation works)

Muséum d'Histoire naturelle

12, rue Voltaire, Nantes

(access via Square Louis Bureau, Place de la Monnaie)

Tel.: +33 (0)2 40 41 55 00

Musée Jules Verne

(on the Butte Sainte-Anne)

3, rue de l'Hermitage, Nantes

Tel.: +33 (0)2 40 69 72 52 (except Tuesdays, Sunday mornings and public holidays)

Les Machines de l'île

"Les Machines de l'île" is a totally unprecedented artistic project based in the unique setting of the former shipyards on the island of Nantes.

This former industrial hub is now home to the Galerie des Machines, the Grand Eléphant and the Carrousel des Mondes Marins.

Boulevard Léon Bureau

Tel.: 08 10 12 12 25 (from France – regular call charge applies)

Tel.: +33 (0)2 51 17 49 89 (from abroad)

Musée naval Maillé-Brézé

Quai de la Fosse – 44187 Nantes

Tel.: +33 (0)9 79 18 33 51

Historical buildings and tourist sites Places and districts

Château des ducs de Bretagne and the *miroir d'eau*

Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul

The Bouffay district

The theatre and Place Graslin

Feydeau Island

Place Royale

The LU tower (entrance via Quai Ferdinand-Favre)

The island of Nantes and the "Machines de l'île"

Passage Pommeraye

The "Maison Radieuse" apartment building designed by Le Corbusier (in Rezé)

Les Machines de l'île

The "lieu unique" contemporary arts and music venue

"Estuaire" contemporary art installations, Nantes – Saint Nazaire

The Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery

The Creative Arts District

The banks of the river Erdre

The Nantes wine district

"Le Nid", a panoramic terrace at the top of the "Tour Bretagne" tower

The Jules Verne Museum

Parks and gardens

Jardin des plantes (opposite the railway station)

Parc du Grand Blottereau (Boulevard Auguste-Peneau)

Parc de Procé (entrances on rue des Dervallières, boulevard Clovis-Constant and boulevard des Anglais)

Parc floral de la Beaujoire (route de Saint-Joseph-de-Porterie, near ExpoNantes exhibition park)

Ile de Versailles (on the banks of the river Erdre)

Parc de la Chanterrie (route de Gachet)

In Loire-Atlantique

Towns

Clisson (château and "Domaine de la Garenne-Lemot" park)

Ancenis (château and the river Loire)

Châteaubriant (château and the old town)

Saint-Nazaire ("Chantiers de l'Atlantique" shipyards and the submarine base)

Guérande (walled town and Brière marshes)

On the coast

Piriac-sur-Mer, Pornic, Pornichet, La Baule, Le Pouliguen.

