

# Two strolls through Orbe and its history

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DID YOU KNOW ?

**Learn in a playful way**

Discover the questions of this guide in order to find out more about Orbe and its past.





## **Yverdon-les-Bains Région Jura/Lac**

This easily accessible region stretches from the foothills of the Jura Mountains to the southernmost point of Lake Neuchâtel. Its attractive towns and villages are located in different settings: mountain, valley, lake or urban. Tourist centres include Grandson, Orbe, Romainmôtier, Sainte-Croix/Les Rasses, Vallorbe, Yverdon-les-Bains and Yvonand.

**[www.yverdonlesbainsregion.ch](http://www.yverdonlesbainsregion.ch)**



## Two strolls through Orbe and its history

-  **Red: about 90 minutes** 
-  **Yellow: about 45 minutes** 

The strolls begin at the market square (Place du Marché) in front of the townhouse.

The numbers all through this guide next to the points of interest, refer to the numbers on the map in the middle of the brochure.



Start point

## Market square

Nothing is missing in this beautiful market square. Admire the monumental fountain on which the knight banneret of Pierrefleur has withstood time and events ever since Pierrefleur's time and brings back memories, especially during local elections. You can also enjoy the arcades, the hospitable small restaurants, and the town hall with the magnificent façade of yellow stones from Valangin that also adorn the old covered market halls. The architectural plans of this façade were made by the Lieutenant Ballival Jeanneret de Grandson.

The yellow stones were carried to Orbe by water as the river was navigable in those times.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

**Orbe is a stage of the Via Francigena**

The Via Francigena is one of the main European pilgrimage routes, dating from the 17th century and leading to Rome.



②



Rue du Château

## The church

Let's take the Rue du Château to go to the church built around several chapels. It has five naves but no choir and no steeple. To overcome this lack, an outflanking tower was added. Later a large opening was made to let the light enter the religious building, and the steeple was transformed into a characteristic bell tower that recalls the five naves.

We must mention that it was Farel and especially Pierre Viret (1511-1571), the child of Orbe, who preached in this church. In order to recall the ambiance of those times it is recommended that you read the memoirs of Pierrefleur, a witness of the Reformation in Orbe. These tell us that Farel had three auditors at his first sermon and ten at the following one, and among them was Pierre Viret.



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Rue du Château

## The castle esplanade and the round tower

Let us continue to walk up the road to arrive at the castle esplanade.

The view of the Orbe plain and of Mont Blanc when it is clear is magnificent. Two of the former four towers currently still exist. The round tower (Tour Ronde) was the master tower, and the more comfortable square tower (Tour Carrée) with its big openings was the gate house. The castle was damaged during the war of Burgundy. During reconstruction an extension of the esplanade was added during the 19th century.

In-between the old stones you will discover a little snapdragon 'antirrhinum asarina' which is unique in Switzerland, introduced by the botanist Boissier from Valeyres-sous-Rances.

In 1475, the Confederates besieged the castle and placed their light artillery on the tower of the surrounding wall (the current clock tower). Take a look at the table at the foot of the master tower, and the one beside the church, at the entrance to the Poterne passage way.

**The castle's round tower** offers a splendid 360° panoramic view of the town's roofs, the Jura Mountains and the Alps. Engraved plaques at the foot of the edifice and inside give much information about this building.







## **A bit of history**

Let us take the time to immerse ourselves in the rich history of this area that stretches back to the Helvetii. During the first century of our era, the Roman locality of Urba on the plateau of Boscéaz developed at a junction of two Roman roads where the famous villa and its mosaics were built. Over the years the junction moved onto the strategic rocky peak in the loop of Orbe. From one tower at the time of Carloman the castle was enlarged up to the 11th century. Farmhouses were built close to the water at the foot of the hills and the upper market town grew around the castle. During the 13th century, under the lords of Montfaucon and Châlon, the agglomeration was surrounded by walls flanked by towers and four gates.



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Chemin  
de Ronde

## The wall walk

Let us go back to the Rue du Château, pass under the gate and walk down the staircase to join the wall walk. It is bounded by high walls and crossed by elegant bridges that connect the dwellings with the gardens. The defensive ditch leads along the ramparts on the eastern side of the town and provided an easy route between the lower town (Tournelle gate) and the castle.

DID YOU KNOW ?

**The sausage with  
cabbage was invented  
in Orbe**

The origin of the sausage with cabbage – pork mixed with cabbage and spices – goes back to the year 879.



Chemin  
de Ronde

## The Museum

You will recognize the museum by its big blue façade. The door gives access to the basement where demonstrations of coffee roasting take place on a machine built at the beginning of the last century. The main entrance is situated in the Rue Centrale. The exhibitions include various collections of objects dating from the Neolithic Era to the 20th century, two beautiful 'old Yverdon' sitting rooms, a collection of medical instruments and one of stuffed birds. You will also discover objects from the Gallo-Roman site of Boscéaz as well as temporary exhibitions. The pleasant basement with its huge open fireplace and the coffee roaster (demonstrations on request) can be rented for social events.



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Rue de la  
Tournelle

## The old prisons

The wall walk leads to the Rue de la Tournelle. This is where the gate of the same name used to be. It was destroyed in 1738, at the same time as the Montsofflet tower and the town furnace. On the left hand side at the upper end of the road you will find a beautiful façade of sandstone veneer, added in 1788 onto the hospital and care home, one of the oldest buildings of Orbe. After having been the district's gendarmerie and prison, it now houses the Tournelle theatre and the library. At the corner of the building close to the inn Auberge du Cheval-Blanc, formerly the Logis de la Botte, you will find a 'hoof stone'. In the 19th century, in order to prevent coaches moving as they slipped and created deep ruts, one of the wheels was blocked by a stick introduced between the spokes. To avoid any damage, wooden or metal clogs were placed under the wheel.



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Rue du Moulinet

## The big abbey

On the heights, like an eagle's nest, this high building once housed the first orthopaedic establishment in the world. It was here that the physician Jean-André Venel (1740-1791) developed medical instruments intended to treat certain congenital anomalies (club feet, bumps etc.) As there was a lack of water,

Jean-André Venel installed a water wheel with buckets in the river

Orbe that allowed water to be carried up to the building (see explanatory panel on the right of the bridge exit). Two years after the Montgolfier brothers, he too built a hot air balloon that reached Yverdon, not by air but after having fallen into the river Orbe.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

**Wine cultivation was introduced by the Romans**

The Côtes de l'Orbe vineyards owe their existence to the Romans, and later to monks and lords who developed the vineyards of the entire region.



## **The windmill and old Rod mills**

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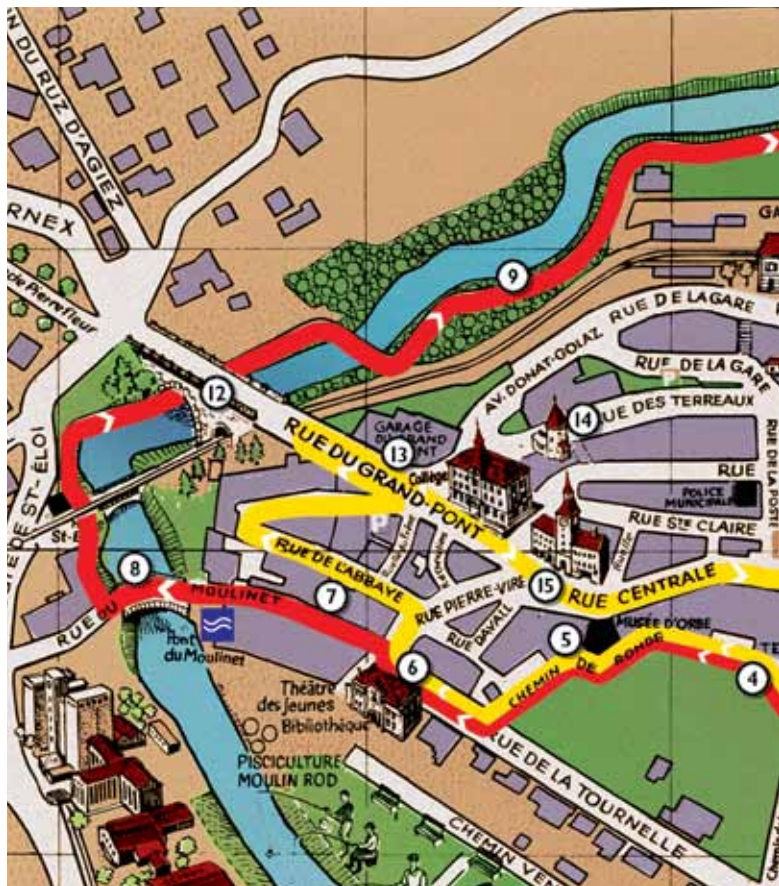


Rue du Moulinet

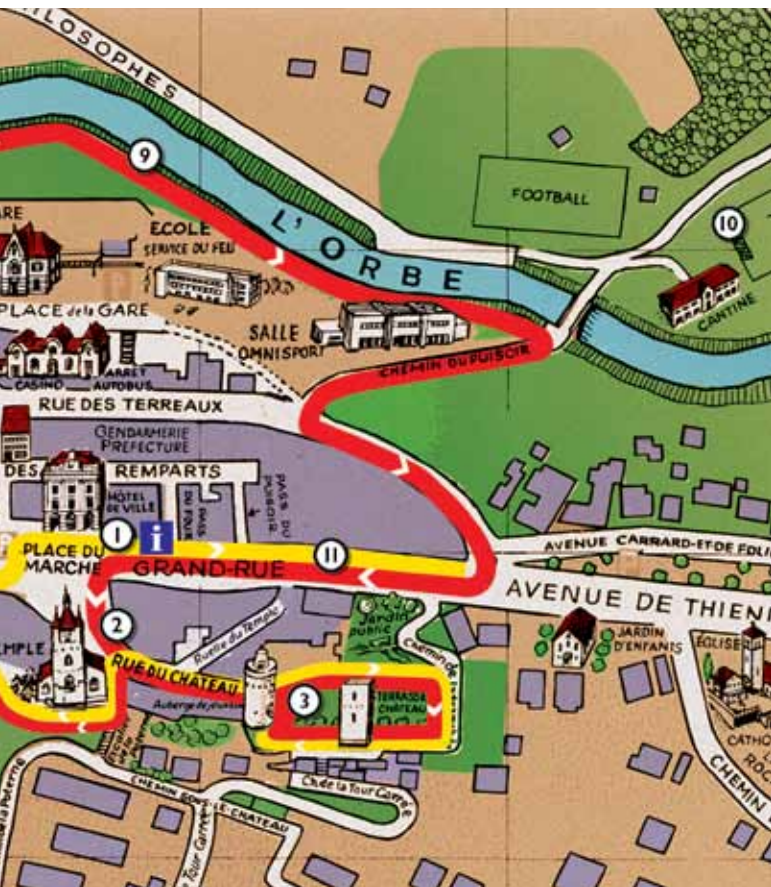
Let us walk down the narrow Rue du Moulinet, one of the most picturesque in town. It used to be the compulsory path for all travellers and goods that had to cross the river. At the lower end was the Saint-Eloi gate, and on the left an alley called La Foulaz. Its name still reminds us that the mills not only produced flour but also cloth. Visitors have the opportunity of visiting the exhibition 'Patrimoine au fil de l'Eau' (natural heritage of the river). The river Orbe is crossed by a humpback bridge built in 1424 thanks to the alms of hermit Father Girard Borelier who lived in the rocks, on the right hand side of the river. The Moulinets bridge is undoubtedly the oldest perfectly preserved bridge made of Swiss stone. It was built to replace the wooden bridges further downstream that were regularly damaged by the flooding of the river. It is said that crossing the bridge gave luck. You then access the reposing 'Chemin des Présidents' (presidents' path) that borders the tranquil river Orbe.



## Town map and course of the strolls







Red itinerary: about 90 min.



Yellow itinerary: about 45 min.



## **A little bit of history**

In 1802, a rather big group of supporters of the former regime of Orbe (the Bernese masters were rather appreciated) wanted to return to power under the leadership of Louis Pillichody, Seigneur of Bavois. Almost 3000 men gathered in Orbe, and 5000 in the canton. The town was encircled. After an exchange of fire and a few deaths, the artillery of the canton of Vaud came into action at the Signal and the Devin. As the shooting was inaccurate, the cannonballs passed over the town. The people of Vaud virtually bombed each other and created immense confusion. Pillichody's troops benefitted from this by escaping via the Puisoir and the gorges of the river Orbe. The troops of Vaud occupied the town, which then had to pay 12,000 francs, a huge sum at that time, in order to avoid pillaging.

The Saint-Eloi gate does not exist anymore. It was situated between the Moulinets bridge and the Grand Pont.



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Along  
the river Orbe

## The presidents' path

Following the Moulinets bridge, we will walk along the narrow path on the right, the 'Chemin des Présidents'. It was designed by the former presidents of the regional council. The population could thus enjoy the river's romance without leaving the town. Walking along the river Orbe, we can see the hydroelectric dam for the mills. We will pass through a tunnel and at its end discover a vast stretch of calm water and the impressive arch of the Grand Pont (see card 12). It was built by the Canton of Vaud in 1830 to facilitate travel for the inhabitants living at the foot of the Jura Mountains and Orbe.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

**The inhabitants  
of Orbe are called  
'Urbigènes'**

The name 'Urbigène' comes from 'Urba', the former name of the town.

**Don't  
miss !**



### **The Roman mosaics**

The biggest Roman villa discovered north of the Alps in Orbe-Boscéaz has nine mosaics of exceptional quality. An exhibition presents the entire villa with an architectural model and a reconstituted 3D projection.

*Open from Easter to the last weekend in October.*

*Monday from 1.30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday to Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1.30 p.m. to 5 p.m., Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from 1.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. Orbe-Boscéaz, A9 (exit Orbe).*



### **The exhibition « Patrimoine au fil de l'Eau »**

In the former Rod mill, an out-of-the-ordinary site steeped in history, the exhibition 'Patrimoine au fil de l'Eau' (Natural heritage of the river) is a fascinating presentation, especially of the Canal d'Entreroches and renewable energies. A pleasant terrace welcomes visitors on the riverside.

*Open from the beginning of April to end of October,  
every day from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

*Rue du Moulinet 33, Orbe.*



Chemin du  
Puisoir

## **The Puisoir sports grounds and the gorges of the river Orbe**

Having crossed the wooden bridge that spans the river, enjoy the calm and quietness of the site. The river Orbe contains trout and grayling, as well as a large variety of species of macro-invertebrates such as mayflies, caddisflies and stoneflies. Furthermore, kingfishers, dippers, wagtails, wrens, grey herons and black kites have made it their home. At dawn or dusk the attentive walker can by chance even observe beavers. Slow worms, Coronella snakes, vipers and wall lizards can sometimes be observed on the left bank. After the rocky part on the shores of the river Orbe, you arrive at the Puisoir sports grounds. You can then choose to either pass the bridge to join the Chalet woods and the deer park, or walk up the slope on the right hand side to return to town. If you prefer to visit the gorges of the river Orbe it is not unusual to see herds of chamois, but if you wish to return to town, turn left at the top of the slope.

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Grand-Rue

## The Grand-Rue

Coming from the Puisoir you arrive at the Rue des Terreaux, turn left to arrive close to the Couronne hotel and enter the Grand-Rue. At nr 37 a memorial plaque points out the place where the former North gate used to be under which you would have passed. The remains of this gate 'Porte Paillardet' were demolished in 1838. Further along on the left at nr 16 admire the Maison Gaillard with its curious façade of sandstone, built by the Registrar Maubert around 1781. On the opposite side at nr 11, the old Maison Estoppey from 1575 with an inner courtyard (Passage du Four) and adorned with Gothic and Renaissance windows, gives access to a tower. Before arriving on a square, admire the chemist's shop Pharmacie BENU, formerly called du Prieuré. The sculpture on the façade recalls that the building was once the barn of the Romainmôtier convent before becoming the Dîme barn.





Rue du  
Grand-Pont

## The Grand Pont

Leaving the Rue de l'Abbaye you arrive on the Rue du Grand-Pont opposite the Lebel house. Its eastern wing was shortened by a few metres to let the road pass when the Grand-Pont was built in 1830 by the canton of Vaud in order to facilitate the movement of traffic at the foot of the Jura Mountains. It cost about 100,000 Swiss francs. The Canton instigated a toll for horse-drawn carriages. The rather clever peasants detached their horses and led them underneath the bridge across the Saint-Eloi bridge, and reattached them to the carriages at the entrance to the town after having pushed them across the big bridge. The limestone river Orbe that has its source in the Jura massif is a jewel for trout and grayling fishing in western Switzerland. It is an ideal river for fly fishing. Permits are available for a day, a week, a month or a season.



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## The Pierrefleur house

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Rue du  
Grand-Pont

Discover the entrance to the Pierrefleur house, dating from 1695, between the garage building and the Lebel house. In order to recall the ambiance of those days it is recommended to read the memoirs of Pierrefleur, an Urbian witness of the reformation in Orbe. It is written there that Farel only had three auditors at his first sermon. At the following service, prescribed by the Bernese, ten faithful attended, and among them Pierre Viret. He also wrote that Antoine Agasse, the lord of the castle, was withdrawn and replaced by the Lutheran Antoine Secrestain. Pierrefleur did not forget to add that the latter was no more a man of virtue after his nomination than before.

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Rue des Terreaux

## The Tour Bernard

An old tower of the town ramparts is adjacent to the Rue des Terreaux. This tower is the last one of the old fortifications, a part of the belt of town walls enclosing the medieval town since the times of Sire Amédée III de Montfaucon-Monbéliard. Its construction dates back to the beginning of the 13th century. Dendrochronologic exams revealed that certain elements of the old wooden roof go back to 1361. Like all the towers of those times, it bore the name as its owner.

### DID YOU KNOW ?

**The Roman mosaics of Orbe are the only remnants of a sumptuous villa**

The most beautiful coherent whole of Roman mosaics north of the Alps was found near Orbe, on the Boscéaz site



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Rue Centrale

## **The old Clarisses convent**

Founded in 1426 by Jeanne de Montbéliard, the convent only existed for less than a century. The Protestant Reformation made the life of the nuns untenable, and they left their establishment in 1555. The building was transformed into the town hall incorporating the pub 'Deux-Poissons'. In the convent, opposite the house where Pierre Viret was born, Loyse de Savoy, the Blessed lady of Orbe, died. Born in 1462 from the union between Amédée IX and Yolande de France, sister of Louis XI, Loyse spent her childhood in different family castles in Savoie and Switzerland. At the age of ten Loyse lost her father. She got married to Messire Hugues de Chalon. As she was extremely pious she wished to follow the way of Saint Clare of Assisi, never missing an occasion to approach the Clarisses monastery of Orbe. She was backed by the Savoie family, which owned the castles of Orbe, Yverdon and Estavayer. A widow at the age of 24, she abandoned all her belongings in 1492 and entered the monastery of Orbe where she lived until her death in 1503.

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