



Lorient Office of Tourism – Gurban Caudal

Rob. I'm with Gurban Caudal, who is the assistant for the promotion of the Office of Tourism, or as it's known here, Lorient Bretagne Sud Tourisme. What can the visitor expect to find here? What are the main things that the visitor must see when he comes to Lorient?

Gurban. Well, there are a lot of things to say about Lorient. When a visitor discovers Lorient, he can find out about the town itself, the centre of town with its shops, its pedestrianised streets, the marina right in town. He can also find out about the tourist trail, starting at what is named Lorient La Base, the former submarine base, built by the Germans during the second world war. This site, used after the war by the French navy, has since become a historical and commercial as well as a tourist site. It was a decision of the town to keep this site and develop it, so that the visitor can come and discover the Cité Eric Tabarly, which is a brand new museum, all about the sea and sailing boats.

Rob. Can I ask, who is Eric Tabarly, for people who don't know?

Gurban. Eric Tabarly was a great sailor, who developed yacht racing, both for the French and internationally. Sadly, he died a few years ago, but remains an emblem for the French, recognised across the sailing world. He raced against and beat the English sailors during the 70's. So this museum was inaugurated in 2008 on the site of the submarine base, and it's Eric Tabarly who provides the link in this exhibition space, where his yachts, the famous Pen Duick, are found. But it's not the only museum there; there's also the submarine "Flore", which you can climb into during the visit to the submarine pens. There's another museum dedicated to other aspects of life underwater; that makes three museums. It's also possible to wander along the quayside and get a flavour of deep-sea sailing, as Lorient is classed internationally as a base for long distance sailing. You can see a lot of huge racing yachts; some of the great skippers have chosen this site as their headquarters, namely Frank Camas of Groupama and Armel Le Cleac'h of Banque Populaire, who won the Vendée Globe race earlier this year. There are lots of other skippers, perhaps not so well known now, but are the great skippers of tomorrow, because they captain the trans-Atlantic yachts. So, many skippers and many yachts that the visitor can see alongside the quayside of La Base. Of course, there are shops, restaurants and cafés at the site, so it's easy to spend the whole day there. There is in addition the possibility of taking a cruise in the bay, and by so doing, discover the history of the place during a 90-minute guided boat trip. So, lots of things to do and see at Lorient La Base.

Rob. Can you just explain for me the origin of the name Lorient?

Gurban. Lorient is a town that is not that old, created in 1766, so it celebrated its

350th anniversary last year. Before Lorient came into existence, Port Louis, on the other side of the bay, (We're going there this afternoon) and there you will come across the Citadel, and its historical importance, as this is where the French East India Company was based. This company needed large ships to make the journey to the Far East and Asia, and on the opposite bank, where today's Lorient stands, there was a shipyard, where one particularly important ship was built, a ship named "The Sun of the East", "Le Soleil de l'Orient". The shipbuilders used to say they were going to L'Orient, speaking about the ship, but the name stuck, and this piece of land became Lorient.

Rob. I want to know a little bit about Lorient in the war. I think it was a very important strategic base for the Germans and therefore was greatly damaged in the war. Are there still buildings which date from before the war?

Gurvan. Indeed, Lorient is known for having been destroyed during the second world war. It was flattened in 1943 when 85-90% of the town was destroyed, so we have very few old buildings like other towns have. This can be an added attraction for some towns; Lorient on the other hand benefits from modern architecture from the '50's onwards, and from 2006, we have offered guided visits to these modern buildings. There are however some older buildings scattered across town, such as in the port area, known as the "enclos du port", where you can see the Tour de la Découverte, an observation tower which was used during the last century to survey the comings and goings in the harbour. There are also some windmills, so we do have some older buildings, though there are fewer than other towns. We are proud to have, on the other hand, fine modern properties.

Rob. Coming back to modern times in Lorient, the city is also the home of the largest music festival in France, I believe. Can you tell us a little bit about the "InterCeltique"?

Gurvan Ah, the International InterCeltique Festival. Yes, it's known throughout the Celtic world, and has been credited with being the largest urban music festival in France. It attracts 700 to 750 thousand visitors who come for 10 days to Lorient to find out about and enjoy the range of Celtic music and dance. This year the dates are from the 4th to the 13th August, and the guest nation this year is Scotland. Every year, the spotlight is on a particular Celtic country, and this year it's Scotland. The festival takes place in the centre of town, and you can see many concerts, some free, some paying. There are all sorts of shows in the street, from the big final concert to the "Nuits InterCeltiques", which are sound-and-light shows in Lorient's stadium. There are fest-noz, in short, all sorts of events around Celtic culture.

Rob. You've told us about Lorient, the city; your remit covers the area around Lorient as well, doesn't it? So tell us what's around the city that's worth visiting.

Gurvan. When we speak about Lorient, we usually include the countryside around the city, an area known as Lorient Bretagne Sud. And it takes in the island of Groix, easy to get to from the city, a little island 8kms long by 4kms wide just offshore, which lends itself to exploration on foot or by bike. It includes the coast around Lorient, because, just 5kms from the town centre, we arrive at the resorts of Larmor-Plage and Pleumeur, with their different beaches, their restaurants and

cafés, but also their wild beaches and creeks. And Lorient Bretagne Sud also includes the other side of the bay with its communes of Port Louis, Riantec and the inland waters of Gavres. And it also encompasses the inland region, the hinterland of Lorient, with the green valleys of the Blavet at Hennebont, and of the Scorff at Pont Scorff. Pont Scorff is known for its artisans and its famous zoo; Hennebont for its national stud, its medieval ramparts and towers. The benefit of the Lorient Bretagne Sud area is that, in just a few kilometres, you can go from the beaches of the coast, to the town, to the countryside and the lovely river valleys.

Rob. What's happening in Lorient today? What's the news for Lorient, the city?

Gurvan. The big news for the town is the arrival of the fast train service. Tomorrow, in fact, is the inauguration of the new train station at Lorient, which will allow visitors to make the journey from Paris in less than 3 hours.

Rob. We're in the Tourist Office here, right by the port, and I see many yachts, big and small. Are there many English visitors to Lorient?

Gurvan. Yes, in fact we receive many visitors from England who arrive in their yachts right in the centre of town, as one of the benefits of Lorient is that there is a marina in the very centre of town. The Tourist Office is on the quayside, and in the Spring in particular, we have a lot of English tourists who come to us for information, directly off their yachts.

Rob. Gurvan Caudal, assistant for promotion of the town, thank you very much indeed for your time

