

## THE LOCAL AREA

If you have still to be seduced by the famous towns, chateaux, and wines of the Loire then you will find all the guide books' famous 'must do's' within easy reach. July/August is naturally the busiest period for sightseeing, and for this reason we would recommend Spring, September/October as the most pleasant times to visit if you want to avoid the crowds.

LA CHARTRE SUR LE LOIR (5kms) is a vibrant little town which has most of the facilities required to enable visitors to enjoy their stay in the area. There are a varied selection of restaurants and bars, mostly located around the charming town square, and there is nothing more pleasant than sitting in the sunshine overlooking the Place de la Republique people watching, whilst sipping a cool beer or wine (Kir or a coffee in winter!). There is a great selection of shops that should satisfy most tastes, plus occasional local markets. Sunday morning shopping is not to be missed as most of the town turns out for this (usually more chatting done than shopping!) before retiring for lunch. There is a newly refurbished outdoor pool, and tennis courts. The town has an historical connection with the Le Mans 24 Hours when some of the teams used to use the Hotel de France as their base. Nowadays during the lead up to the event in mid June the town still gets caught up in the atmosphere of this unique event, and there can be some pretty exotic machinery spotted in the town square! Also, during the more recently introduced Le Mans Classic event, held every two years, the town becomes a focal point for many historic racing enthusiasts (and their cars!)

The main attraction in MARCON (4 kms) is the Lac des Varennes ([www.ville-marcon.fr](http://www.ville-marcon.fr)) a fantastic recreational complex on the edge of the village. Facilities covering some 70 hectares (50 hectares lake) include beach, picnic areas, sailing, pedalos, mini-golf, tennis, and archery. A lovely spot to spend some leisure time, either enjoying the sporting activities or relaxing over a picnic lunch.

There are also numerous marked walking and bicycle trails in the area, including the magical Berce Forest. The local tourist office in la Chartre ([www.vallee-du-loir.com](http://www.vallee-du-loir.com)) will have all the information to assist you make the most of your visit to the lovely Vallee du Loir.

TOURS, the attractive capital of Touraine, is 40 mins away by car. The town has the feel of a mini Paris and has lots to offer the visitor. The beautiful cathedral is well worth a visit and there are enough galleries and museums to satisfy most interests. Stroll along the river bank or through the flower market and enjoy lunch in one of the many little restaurants around Place Plumereau in the centre of the old town. Tours is a town well worth visiting throughout the year.

Other well known Loire Valley towns within an easy drive for a days sightseeing are Amboise (our favourite!) with it's magnificent Chateau (connections to Leonardo da Vinci) which dominates the town and is the best place to view the river and its surrounding countryside. Saumur, again with it's chateau, wine museum and the Cadre Noir equestrian school, and Blois with it's Royal Chateau, museums and historic centre. Other major chateaux such as Chinon, Azay-le-Rideau, Villandry, Chenonceaux, Cherverny, Chambord (apologies to the many more we have missed!) are all within easy reach.

Also within an easy drive is Le Mans, making the area a popular place to stay for visitors to the famous Le Mans 24 hrs race, as well as various other motor sport events held throughout the year, including the increasingly popular Le Mans Classic held bi-annually (next one July 2010) – a much more relaxed affair! The Museum at the Circuit and the beautifully restored old town and cathedral are also well worth a visit. A marvellous new tram system allows you to visit the town centre without the hassle of car parking.

For something closer to home take the route from La Chartre following the Loir east towards Vendome and visit the ancient Troglodyte settlement of Troo, the designated Plus Beaux Village de France of Lavardin, and Vendome itself, a lovely town of art and history. There are also various Routes des Vignobles in the area where you can sample the local wines such as Jasnières and Coteaux du Loir.

At 'Orliarriere you will be ideally located to explore the delightful Sarthe countryside and the Vallee du Loir, as well as the more famous attractions of the Loire Valley itself.