

Bulletin !

An informal look at life in this part of France and a selection of things to see and do (depending on the time of year).

Thought for the month:

Life and beer are very simple:

chill for best results

WISHING YOU ALL A HAPPY AND HEALTHY 2024

Not many *vide-greniers* (v-g) or *brocantes* at this time of year, but you can check at www.brocabrac.fr for any last-minute additions. ['50' = area; ± = number of stalls expected]:

Sun. 21st Granville (50) *Marché d'Antiquités Brocante* in Cour
Jonville, ±30

Marché de Noël

Until Sun. 7th Rennes (35) *Village de Noël* in Rennes (35), dily 12h to 21h in
Place de Parlerment – many stalls including *gourmand
chalets*, fairy decorations and other surprises.

Vide-maison (house clearance)

Sat. 6th & Flers (61) at 7 rue des Rochettes. Flers : everything must be sold.
Sun. 7th Low prices for items (incl. some medical equipment).

'*La galette des rois*' – a tasty tradition

A seasonal reminder that France celebrates Epiphany each year on the second Sunday after Christmas with the *galette des rois* – a traditional puff pastry cake filled with *frangipane*, a thick almond cream. This tradition traces its roots back to the Middle Ages when the last piece of the cake, often called the 'piece for the poor', was reserved and given to the first needy person knocking at the door. Inside is a little surprise – these days *un santon* (figurine) – and the person who gets the slice with the *le santon* is declared 'king' and so crowned.

Eating out - restaurant bar Marrakech

Last May this Moroccan restaurant opened (at the bar 'Saint-Lys' whose owners retired) by Abdelghani Moufakir. A Moroccan menu is offered, with *entrées*, (hot and cold salads), meat with several accompaniments, and couscous (also vegetarian) and tajines. Open daily except Mondays, 8h to 14h & 18h to 22h. There is an outside terrace, and access for the handicapped. For reservations phone: 02 33 68 90 30; The address is 7 PLACE DU PARVIS, Sourdeval, France and it's on Facebook as "Le saint Lys" for the address and phone number, but it seems the restaurant has since changed hands.

Christmas illuminations can still be enjoyed

Until Sat. 6th, you can still take a delightful tour of the *bocage* to see the Christmas lights before they are switched off. For more info, contact www.ornetourisme.com.

Something for all the family

At *La Ferme du Bois Gamats*, Chemin du Château du Bois Gamats in Laval, you can see the production of asses' milk and learn how to make soap. This farm has many animals – angora goats & horses as well as donkeys, and you can also learn how they are cared for: on Tues 2nd, 10h30 to 12h. Mainly for children (older than 3 yrs) but adults can also take part. Reservation necessary: 11€ per child, and 3€ for an accompanying adult. For more details and info on other events taking place there: info@asinerieduboisgamats.fr

Le Jardin Public in Fougères (35)

Situated at the base of the château you can discover the secrets of these lovely gardens which offer a view on the medieval quarter and the château. There are actually 3 gardens - an English-style garden, a French-style garden with geometric forms, and a botanical garden - each with its own character. The gardens were formed in 1760, originally just a tree-lined walk, and were renovated in 1865 by *la Société d'Horticulture de Fougères*, with the idea of creating a natural, enjoyable space for the people of the town. You will also find picnic areas and there are often exhibitions on site.

Taking photos / videos of your valuables

A reminder that we are advised to take photos of our valuables in case of theft, fire or other damage for insurance identification purposes. However, unless you can prove that the item was actually in the insured house it may not be covered in any claim you make on your insurance policy. So, while taking the individual photos it is a good idea to make a video showing the items '*in situ*' to use as proof '*au cas où*' (just in case).

Circus family in the Parc de la Colmont, Gorrion (53)

For the past 27 years, the circus troupe Venissia, owned by the Dumas family, have overwintered in Gorrion. It is a family business with a dozen people working there, including 7 circus artists with juggling, rope gymnastics & trapeze, and there are a few domestic animals (performing dogs, miniature horses). Their main aim is to make people laugh. Each year the family invite children and adults to join their initiation classes for circus acts, puppet theatre and applying children's facial make-up. They spend the winter months practising new acts,

and in the past have put on a couple of shows in the huge red and yellow circular tent which can hold 300 people.

Beer tasting in Laval (53)

On Tues. 2nd to Fri. 5th, between 15h & 21h, and Sat. 6th, between 10h & 19h, at ‘Templemousse’ in the heart of Laval, you can enjoy the last days of the Laval Christmas illuminations while tasting a selection of local beers (12.5cl each) with a small platter of finger food to go with them. Tickets 15€ per person (minimum age 18). Reservations and more information at the Laval Tourist Office (02 43 49 45 26).

Where did the word ‘curfew’ come from?

Amongst the many buzzwords used in the French media during the Covid-19 home confinement period was *couvre-feu*, meaning curfew. It was used in particular with reference to night-time traffic-banning measures imposed in certain towns and cities. *Couvre-feu* originated in the Middle Ages, and the custom it describes was adopted by William the Conqueror. However, it was not an order to stay at home to ward off civil unrest or to prevent virus spread. With the majority of houses at the time made of timber, fire hazard was an over-riding concern. So, at 20h, a curfew bell rang out by order of local *bourgmestres* – the communal authority of the time, like a *maire* – informing residents that it was time to extinguish all candles and fires (in posher houses a *couvre-feu* later became the name of a metal utensil to do this). Officials would scout the towns looking for non-compliers.

Truc-troc in Fontaine-Daniel (53)

On Sun. 21st, 10h to 13h, at *l’Epicerie* in Fontaine-Daniel, you can take items (china, books, clothes, toys, tools, garden produce, etc) to be swapped (from Fr.: *troquer* : to swap). All items not exchanged must be taken back by the owners and not left behind. More info: www.lepicerie.org

Cheese of the Month - *Boursault*

Originating in the French region of Val-de-Marne, *Boursault* (also known as *Lucullus*) is a popular triple-cream cheese made from cow’s milk. A goat variant of *Boursault* is available as *Boursault Chevre*. The cheese, invented in 1953 by Henri Boursault, has a very high fat content which lends it a melt-in-the-mouth creamy soft consistency. With fat percent tipping the scales at nearly 75%, the ultra-rich buttery taste and creamy texture makes it a favourite dessert cheese. It has a thin, bloomy rind due to a light penicillin mould.

Affinage of *Boursault* takes about 2 months, with one more month for packaging. As the cheese ages, it acquires a mushroomy and refreshing citrusy taste. The cheese, sold in small cylinder-shaped rounds, should be consumed within a week of purchase. Try pairing this cheese with grapes or pears and light, fruity wines like Vouvray.

Feeding the birds

As a reminder when feeding our feathered friends: while it is safe to feed birds certain fruits, it is important to remove the seeds and pips first. Some fruit seeds & pips, like those in grapes, apples and pears, contain traces of cyanide which is harmful to birds. Chocolate is also known to be very toxic for birds and can cause convulsions, heart arrhythmia, vomiting and even death. Birds lack the enzymes required to digest theobromine which is found in cocoa beans, say the experts.

Comptage des oiseaux de jardin (Counting the garden birds)

In Normandie at the end of each January, 1,742 communes take part in this counting of birds. Note: only birds actually landing should be counted, not those flying overhead or landing in your neighbour's garden! Again last year in gardens, parks and school grounds, *le rouge-gorge* (robin) was the most observed, present in 86% of the gardens, followed by *le merle noir* (blackbird) at 79.8% and *la mésonge charbonnier* (great-tit/tom-tit) third at 78.1%. *Le moineau* (sparrow) was the most common with an average of 7.2 per garden, *le mésonge bleu* (blue-tit) in 2nd position and *le mésonge charbonnier* in 3rd place. *Les pinsons des arbres* (finches) dropped to 4th place in 2022, followed closely by *l'étourneau sansonnet* (starling).

The next counting event: '*Grand Comptage des Oiseaux de Jardin*' is on the 27th & 28th January 2024. For more info you can contact GON (*Groupe Ornithologique Normand*), 181 rue d'Auge, Caen (14); www.gonm.org, 02 31 43 52 56., or google the heading of this article.

And now for something completely different . . .

At the *mediathèque* (library) in Entrammes (53), at the hours of opening [Tues: 16h30-18h; Weds: 10h-12h & 14h-18h; Fri.: 16h30-19h; Sat: 10h-12h. Closed on Mons., Thurs. & Sundays], amateur gardeners can take packets of their seeds (*les graines*) and can swap them for other seeds. No professionally harvested seeds can be promoted. The project at this venue is being known as *la grainothèque*.

Guided visit of the Laval illuminations with *vin chaud*

On Fri. 5th & Sat. 6th, 18h15 to 19h30, this guided visit will depart from outside the *Hotel de Ville* (Place du 11 Novembre), followed by a warming glass of mulled wine. Tickets: 8€ - &/or more info from the Laval Tourist Office: www.laval-tourisme.com; 02 43 49 45 26, & billetterie@laval-tourisme.com

Dinner cruise through the Laval illuminations

Aboard the boat '*Harmonie*', on Fri. 5th & Sat. 6th, 20h to 22h30, you can treat yourselves to a special evening - a boat trip on the river Mayenne to delight the eyes, with a festive meal to please the taste buds and live musical accompaniment for the ears! The menu comprises an *apéritif* and 5 courses for 69€ (children 39€) and departs from Quai André Pinçon (in front of *Cineville*). Reservation required in advance at the Laval Tourist Office (02 43 49 45 26).

‘Helianthus’ charity

This registered charity, whose aim is to help local animals in need, has a shop at 48 rue du Champ de Foire in Pré-en-Pail (53), sells bric-a-brac, clothes, furniture, books and much more. All donations are very welcome. Open: Weds. 14h-17h and Sats. 9h30 to 12h30. For more info: 02 43 04 97 26, *helianthus-asso.org* and on facebook

We say, they say

The next time someone is described as ‘having hair in the palm of their hand’ (*avoir un poil dans la main*), they are telling you he is lazy, rather than crazy!

And finally,:

After my friend turned vegan it was like I’d never seen herbivore



A shorter version than normal – usual for this time of year – but I hope what you find inside is of interest.

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