

## The history town

It's intermediate between the two other towns, both for its area, 3122 hectares, as for its population, 14 000 inhabitants, constantly growing, so that, according to experts, The Land of Olonnes might reach 50 000 inhabitants in the short term.



**The History Town**, because the first barons of Olonne settled in this area, particularly in a castle probably built in the 9th century, which gave its name to this town; unfortunately nothing remains. But the current St Hilaire Church would have been built on the site of the former chapel of the Counts of Olonne which adjoined the castle. Nevertheless, if the castle no longer exists, the home of "Fenestreau" would have been built in the 15th century, in part with stones of the ancient feudal castle. After being destroyed a few times, this home was rebuilt in 1810. Only a magnificent porch is dated from the 15th century. Among the main sites of Château d'Olonne, we find Benedictine Abbey St Jean d'Orbestier, typical of the Romanesque Architecture in Vendée. It was built in 1110 but often destroyed, burnt and torn down. It was only in 1989 that the Town Council decided to acquire it and it's under renovation. The Abbey is no longer a place of worship, but it regularly hosts cultural events and exhibitions. A natural site, "Well of Hell" is the subject of various legends; in fact, it's a 30 metres natural rift in the rock, on the coast. On spring tides days, the sea rushes through the rift with impressive roars and such a violence, that the waves sometimes rise about ten metres high, producing extensive and vaporous gushes of spotless white foam, what attracts many onlookers who don't fear getting well and truly soaked. That unique sight, as the guidebooks precise it, is worth seeing. St Jean Mill, private property, houses a collection of 500 headdresses of Vendée which can be seen by groups through The Tourist Office of Château d'Olonne. The Sand Museum is a rare sight as well with its 13000 sand samples from the whole world. At last, when you visit The Land of

Olonnes, don't forget to go hiking on the beautiful pedestrian footpath that runs along the coast of Château d'Olonne over several kilometres, without specific difficulties and among the holm oaks. It offers great views on the rocks which line the coast; according to people, some of them would have been sculpted by artists of genius and they allow photographers to come back with dream memories.

In the boardroom of the Town Hall of Château d'Olonne, we can see the Twinning Charter signed by the Mayors of Olonne, Sables d'Olonne, Château d'Olonne and Worthing on 17th October 1998. If we need one more reason to authenticate the History Town, especially within the context of the Twinning with Worthing, we can mention that Richard The Lion-Heart, King of England from 1189 to 1199, son of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II Plantagenet, visited the monks of St Jean d'Orbestier in 1182 because he used to hunt on the lands of the Abbey where he owned a hunting lodge. Texte de Rollan Houillon, member du Jumelage