

★ Start in front of the tourist information office. You are in the Place de la Marie (Town Hall Square). From 1890 to 1972, the Town Hall was a girls' school. In 1972 the schools in the town were merged under the current school group name of 'Mick Michey'!

1 Cross the Place du Marche (Market Square) towards the River Saone. A market is held here every Thursday and Sunday morning in winter.

2 You are now on the quayside, where the Montmerlois (the people of Montmerle) like to stroll along in the shade of the plane trees, which were planted in 1845. There is a market here every Sunday morning from April to September. Go to the right and continue along the quayside for about 100 metres.

3 Number 1 South Quay: the house on your right has an enclosed courtyard with access to the river. It was once a landing stage for the horses pulling barges along the towpath alongside the river. Behind this house, on the Rue du Port, was a hotel which welcomed travellers arriving by boat.

4 At number 7 Rue du Port, there is a stone plaque marking the level reached by the River Saone in 1840 during one of the worst floods ever known. After this disastrous event, 'flood doors' were built in houses on the banks of the river, giving an escape route to people in these terraced properties at times of flooding. These flood doors and markers are a reminder of the sometimes dangerous proximity of the River Saone.

5 Nique Bedin House: Number 12 Rue du Port has a stone on its gate engraved with the letters 'NB' This stone marked the marriage of Doctor Francois Nique and Miss Bedin in 1894. This large bourgeois house was originally a farm, to which a directoire-style wing added in 1830.

6 On the quayside at the end of the Rue du Port, there is a laundry-boat once used by washerwomen and abandoned in 1922.

The Rue du Port takes its name from its direct access to the port on the Saone. This harbour was considered an important transit point, in particular because the famous boat 'Le Parisien' stopped there until the 1930s. Le Parisien sailed between Lyon and Chalons-sur-Saone, carrying goods in its hold and 50 to 80 passengers on its decks. The round trip took two days.

7 Rue du Port: How can you miss the Montmerle Bridge that takes you to St George-de-Reneins? Before 1835, people crossed the river Saone by ferry. The first bridge was made of wood and was a toll bridge. The current bridge, made of aluminium alloy, was built in 1973 and was the first of its kind in France. One of its piles has three flood-level markers: 1799, 1955 and 1956.

8 At number 12 Rue du Port, the present hotel-restaurant Emile Job was once a highly popular dance hall called 'Vauxhall', complete with its own orchestra.

9 At the corner of Rue du Port and Rue de Macon is a marker showing flood levels in 1840.

10 At number 25 Rue de Macon, look up and take a few steps back. A polychrome virgin and child are looking at you from the shelter of their niche in the wall.

11 At the corner of Rue de Macon and Rue de la Foire (Fair Street) there is another flood-level marker.

12 Go down the Rue de la Foire: have you heard of the famous horse fair of Montmerle? At one time, there were four fairs. The most famous of them was created in 1605. It began on 9th September and lasted for about three weeks. As well as the diverse goods arriving by land and river during the 19th century, you would find 2,500 to 3,000 horses at the fair. Today, the fair only lasts two days but is still one of the main events in September.

13 At the end of the Rue de la Foire, you are back at the quayside. On your right you can admire the Parc de la Batellerie which was once Montmerle's fairground. The tiered quayside was where the boats were unloaded.

14 From here, you can admire the island of Montmerle. It used to be meadow land. Today it is covered by poplar trees. Cattle used to graze here, transported across the Saone on a special ferry for animals.

15 Walk through the Parc de la Batellerie alongside the quays and go down the Allee du Parc to rejoin the Rue de Macon. Once you are on this road, have a look at a little building on your left that looks derelict. It used to be the station used by a train called 'Le Tacot' (The Banger) which travelled the line between Trevoux and Saint-Trivier-de-Courtes until the 1930s.

16 On the left, just opposite the station at number 50 Rue de Macon is a huge house covered in Virginia Creeper. This is Mick Michey's house. She was a painter-decorator before becoming one of the main singing stars of French variety in the 1950s. In 1974 she became a sculptress working in steel, and is now well-known in artistic circles. The house is on the Chemin des Princes: walk along this road until you come to the Rue des Minimes.

26 Church Saint-Nicholas: Built in 1835 in a neo-classic style, the church was commissioned by Priest Guyoux, Vicar of Montmerle. He was the inventor of the equatorial sundial. There remain about a dozen of these sundials, particularly one in the Trappist Abbey des Dombes in Plantay.

27 At number 13 Rue de Lyon you can see a wrought iron fanlight from 1780, representing a craftsman's tools (an axe, a compass, a set square). It might be proof that this place was a stopping-point on the Trade Guilds' tour around France. (Tour de France de Compagnonnage).

28 At number 18 Rue de Lyon: go through an entrance on your right. You are now in the Passage des Mariniers (The mariners' alley) another reminder of the importance of the river Saone to the town. This alley is named after those who navigated the river in barges carrying goods or equipment and who stopped in Montmerle.

29 You are now back on the quayside. This area was a source of inspiration for another famous character of Montmerle, the commander Jean-Baptiste Tournassoud (1866 - 1951), grandfather of Mick Michey! Along with the Lumiere Brothers, he was one of the first autochrome photographers. He is famous for his military images but he also took many photographs of the region.

Follow the quayside to the Chemin de la Riviere just behind the mini golf park. Take it and you will reach Rue de Lyon.

30 The Castel de Valrose: this amazing house in Rue de Lyon was built in 1925, between the two World Wars and at the beginning of the Art Deco movement. A fashionable architect of the period was commissioned to design the house by a M. Serre, an industrialist from Lyon, who had decided to build a second home in Montmerle-sur-Saone, already well-known for its peacefulness and good quality of life. To finish your tour, a passage situated between the number 34 and number 36 in rue de Lyon will take you to the docks.

17 Once you are on the Rue des Minimes, take the stone path that goes up to the chapel. After 100 metres, keep to the left and walk between the two boundary stones. These stones were once called phallic stones and were thought to be petrified human beings that could help to remedy sterility.

After the boundary stones, turn right and go up to the chapel square

18 From the square you can admire the river Saone that flows through the valley. When it floods, it covers the surrounding fields, producing a rich natural fertiliser. It also provides a navigation channel which used to make the Saone valley vulnerable to attack. This is the reason that farms around here are fortified.

19 The Chapel and the Chateau des Minimes: a feudal castle once stood on the Minimes site. It was the monastery and home of the Reverend Minimes fathers. The castle was destroyed in 1793. The Chapel des Minimes became famous thanks to Saint Cure d'Ars who particularly loved the place.

Cross the square then go round the chapel by its right to reach the Tower.

20 The Minimes Tower: built in 1843 by a M. Voisin. It was restored in 2002 and is now owned by the town. It is around 20 metres high. The Parc des Minimes was created by Treveys, who designed the famous gardens in Vichy.

21 The vineyard of Minimes Tower: during the 19th century there were many wine-growers in Montmerle who cultivated the vines in summer and were chair-makers in winter. Most of the vineyards disappeared between 1955 and 1956. Today, the Minimes vineyards are the last sign of this lost tradition, but it is revived in September each year during European Heritage Days - a celebratory grape harvest event organised by the Brotherhood of Minimes knights (La confrerie des chevaliers des Minimes).

With the tower behind you, take on the right and follow the path which cross the park and reach the road. Take the road on your right and follow it before taking the alley that goes down on your right next to the park. At the end of this path, you arrive in Rue des Minimes, go to the left

22 At number 23 Rue des Minimes you can still make out some old advertising on the wall.

23 At number 24 Rue des Minimes you will be passing the entrance to the Chateau de la Zeille. Built in 1810, its former owner, Jean-Pierre Higorique, was a theatre entrepreneur in Bordeaux and Lyon. Later it became the property of M. Farfouillon, an architect in Lyon.

24 At number 17 Rue des Minimes, look out for the lovely little stone figure of the Virgin Mary.

25 At number 14 Rue des Minimes, you will find a well which takes its name - puts a bonnet- (bonnet-well) from its shape. The pump was built in 1843 and has a triangular section on top. In fact, wells supplied many houses until 1957. The water in the wells came either from the water table or from rainwater. The wells were strictly regulated to ensure good relations between neighbours.

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Turn your back at the church and go down to the Place de l'Eglise and turn Rue de Macon on your left.

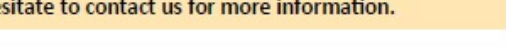
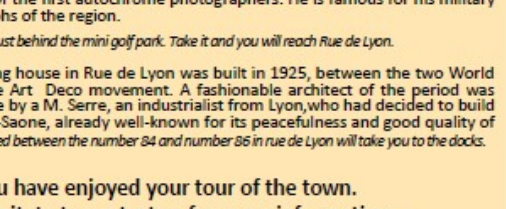
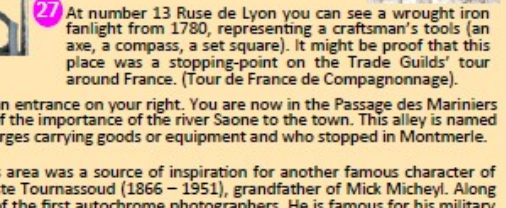
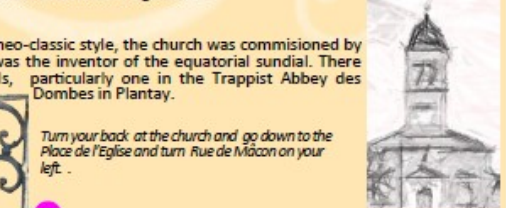
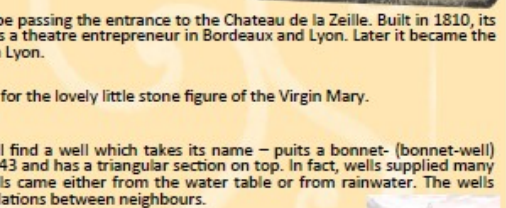
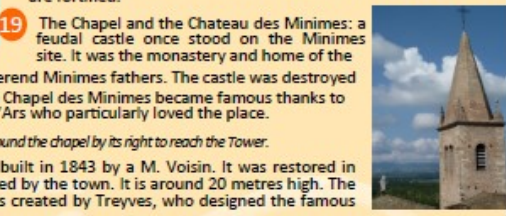
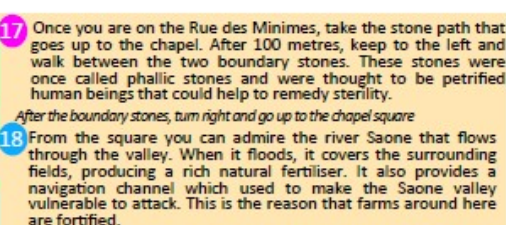
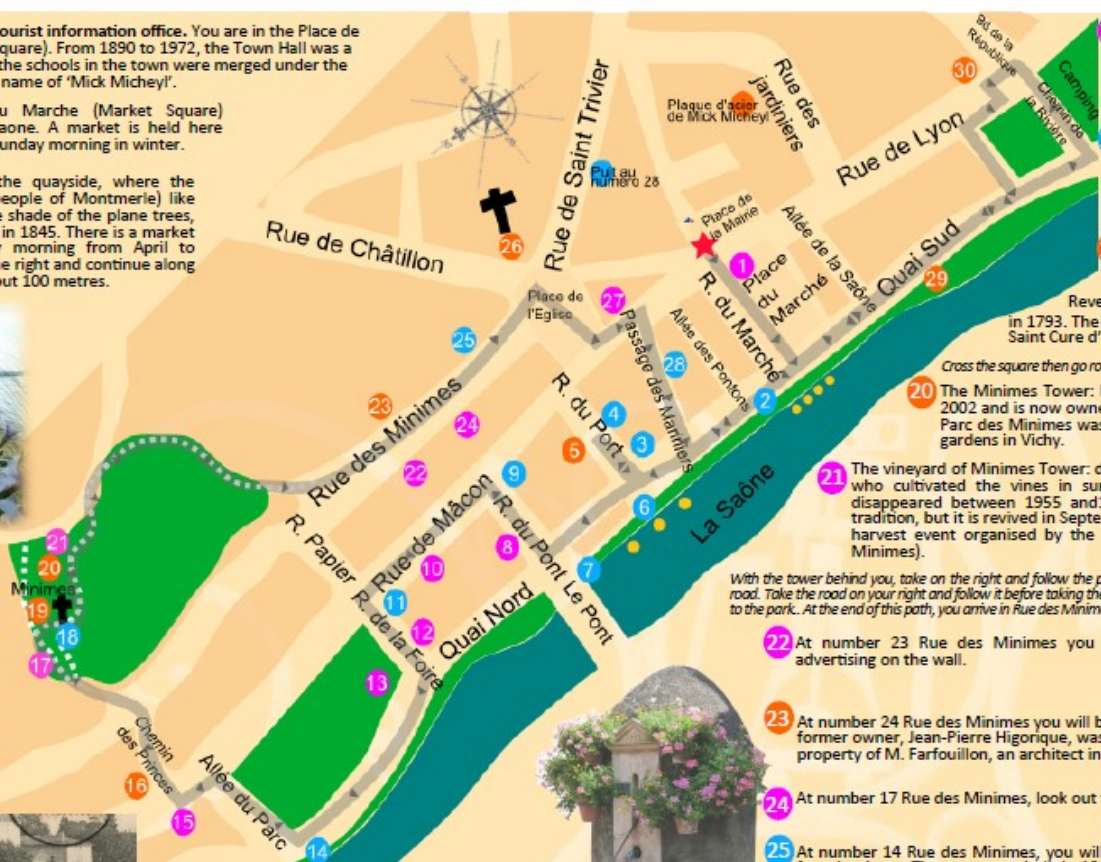
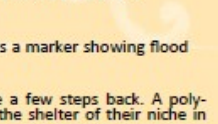
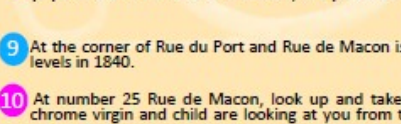
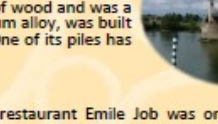
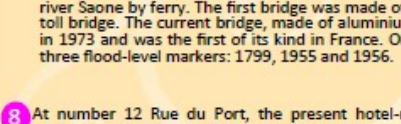
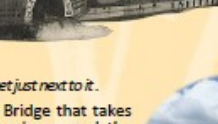
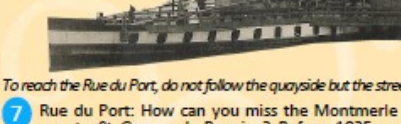
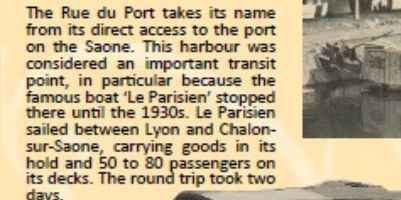
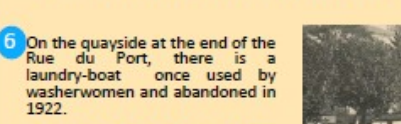
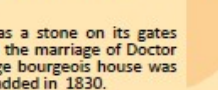
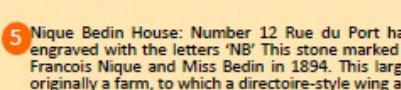
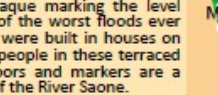
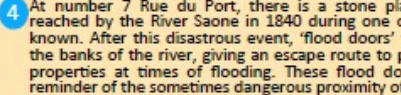
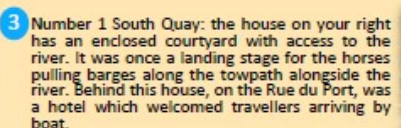
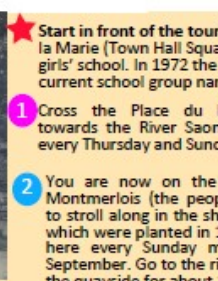
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