

Yverdon les bains map

Yverdon is located in the heart of a natural setting formed by the Jura mountains, the plains of the Orbe, the hills of the Broye and Lake Neuchâtel. It is the second most important town in the Canton of Vaud. It is known for its thermal springs and is an important regional centre for commerce and tourism.

It was awarded the Wakker Prize in 2009 for the way the city handled and developed the public areas and connected the old city with Lake Neuchâtel.

The heights nearby Yverdon seem to have been settled at least since the Neolithic Age about 5000 BCE, as present archeological evidence shows. The town was at that time only a small market place, at the crossroads of terrestrial and fluvial communication ways. People began to settle, at first in temporary huts at the water-front, for fishers and merchants, then in permanent dwellings.

About a century later, the Romans realized the commercial and strategic importance of this place: it controlled major routes such as Geneva-Avenches, connecting the Rhône and Rhine basins, as well as those of Rhone and Danube.

When Peter II of Savoy gradually extended his rule over the Pays de Vaud (Land of Vaud), he managed to impose road tolls as well as port and fishing taxes. He founded the new town ("Ville Neuve") of Yverdon, defended by walls and a castle. Construction works were launched around 1259 and attracted many settlers.

The imposing main walls and their four towers were erected within a few years. The design of the castle followed the geometric characteristics used for castles set in plains, and had been planned by the young mason and architect Jacques de Saint-Georges. Jacques also planned Caernarvon Castle and built the castle Saint-Georges d'Espèranche, near Lyon.

Yverdon's castle used to be the residence of the castellans of the Savoy dynasty, until 1536, followed by the bailiffs of Bern state. In 1798, the Département du Léman became the castle's owner. The Département had been set up by the short-lived "Helvetian Republic" (1798-1803), imposed by Napoleon I.

The 18th century proved to be one of Yverdon's most favorable periods, marked by cultural and economic highlights. Then a town of about 2.000 inhabitants, Yverdon became known as a spa, and as a centre of thought (58 tomes of Yverdon Encyclopedia, published between 1770 and 1780), being in close contact with the great minds and movements of the time.

Burnand, its architect, erected the town hall between 1768 and 1773, on the site of the former covered market. Inside the building, furniture and decorations are displayed, faience stoves, panels, wainscots and paintings.

The vaults of the ancient granary are used year-round for art exhibitions.

14 stalls, figuring apostles and prophets, originate from the ancient chapel and are ascribed to Claude de Peney, who had worked at Fribourg and Hauterive. Peney died in 1499, and Bon Bottolier, cabinetmaker in Lausanne, was charged with crafting the stalls (1501-1502). Potier, of French origin, built the organ in 1766.

The springs were known for their mineral baths and used at least since the Roman era, but most probably before, at the time of the Helvetii. It is supposed that the springs were a sacred place, with some sort of wooden structure. Middle Age documents prove the existence of a spa centre, as early as 1429, and mention several useful buildings.

By 1728, the authorities decided to have a new spa constructed. Its reputation grew rapidly. The 18th century saw major developments and brilliant success, for the town and the spa. Then followed a period of decline: the spa lost its popularity, and by 1800 had declined to a simple political meeting point. Completely neglected, the buildings dilapidated.

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