

This engraving is by Joackim Duviert. Henry IV commissioned Duviert, for some unknown reason, to sketch a considerable number of towns all over France.

“Humble sinners nibble in peace, forget Lent and crunch the cornuelle.”

1. Historical

25 kms south of Angouleme, on the doorstep of the Perigord, surrounded by agricultural land scattered with forests, rises the hill of Villebois-Lavalette. It is bordered to the north by the ancient roman road leading from Saintes to Perigueux, called the Chemin Boisne (some people see this as the origin of Villebois' name). Historians estimate that the site has been inhabited since the Gallo-roman period.

This hill, which provides a wonderful view, is crowned by the ruins of a (10th century) feudal castle, with its medieval enclosing walls as well as the remains of a princely 17th century structure, which is currently undergoing restoration. This restoration work began in the 1980's under the aegis of an association “The Friends of the Castle”. The castle's present owner is pursuing this work in recognition of the architectural and historic value of the site.

Roman tiled houses rise in tiers on the sides of our fortified hill. They protect our 17th century covered market, classified as a monument of historic value, as well as our ancient alleyways.

2. Geographical Situation:

Villebois-Lavalette is close to the departmental route D939 linking Angouleme to Perigueux. The town lies at the centre of other attractive sites such as La Rochefoucauld, Aubterre and Brantome, all of which play a part in the cultural tourism map.

At the gateway to the Perigord, 2km from the prehistoric site of La Quina, the Neanderthal centre discovered by Dr. Henri-Martin, our estate brings together a winning hand, necessary for large scale tourist development.

For 40 years, we have known how best to promote these attributes, affirming the character of the village and its rank as the administrative centre of the district, or canton.

With its 790 inhabitants, the village has at its disposal a level of services and enterprise comparable to those one finds in much larger towns. This potential represents a real capacity to welcome further development. Whilst today, our industrial zone generates much local employment, Villebois-Lavalette manages to maintain a balance between agricultural as well as industrial activity and the attractive heritage of the town centre.

The urban and architectural heritage has been preserved and restored with the same care and quality as imposed upon monuments like the castle and the covered market. Thanks to that and also the willingness of the Department of the Charente and the Region, Villebois-Lavalette has been recognised as a “City of Character”.

This recognition has enabled us to establish a programme of action which continues to protect the town's heritage and nurture its potential, for example:

1. The creation of a zone for the protection of architectural heritage, urban and landscape, allowing the village to evolve without being denatured (ZPPAUP).
2. The restoration of the facades of private houses and public buildings.

You only need to gaze at the castle, and take one of the roads which lead to this medieval fortress: here one discovers a dovecot, an old well, a dressed stone façade, an elegant Renaissance door, a turret, a 300 year-old sundial and some pretty springs, all of which testify to the history of our city. From the top of the 77 church steps, you will discover a vast, harmonious landscape.

Villebois-Lavalette incorporates all its heritage potential in a clear and culturally high standard of tourism. As part of this process we have created a tour to promote and develop our history.

This tour winds around the roads and alleys inviting the visitor to discover places symbolised by a special logo in the shape of our famous 'cornuelle' (a triangular shortbread biscuit).

If you would like to find out more, follow the cornuelle trail, using the information sheet "Circuit de valorisation du patrimoine de Villebois-Lavalette", which you can get free from the tourist office or any of the local retailers in town. ***Have a good tour!***