

Head West to La Sarthe, another neighboring departement (You may want to include Fresnay-Sur-Sarthe on the way – See “H” on the “less-than-a-half-hour” map), and note, as you drive, how the blueish-gray slate on the roofs become brown tiles, following local resources.

Aim for **Bourg-le-Roi**, (33km, 36') a sleepy tiny village with a fascinating history.

It is known for a very delicate form of embroidery called the Point de Beauvais, and here is its history :

Henry II Plantagenet made the decision in 1169 to build a fortified town at **Bourg-le-Roi** in order to protect his interests in the region. This little village - which never grew to be the major city it was intended to be - has kept some significant architectural traces from that time, with fortified ramparts of a kind unique in the Sarthe and rare in all of France.



Entrance to the fortified village

Much later, the Point de Beauvais embroidery came to France via Italy, having arrived there via the China trade routes in the late middle ages.

This form of “linked stitch” embroidery became enormously popular from the 17th century, probably reaching its greatest heights in the 18th and carrying on well into the 20th century. A workshop was founded at Bourg-le-Roi by Margaret **Boulard** in 1840, and at its peak it was employing up to 60 home needleworkers. Surprisingly, the last commercial embroidery workshop at Bourg-le-Roi closed its doors as late as 1968.

The Point de Beauvais Museum

The **Musee du Point de Beauvais** counts among its exhibits a 12m long embroidered frieze tracing the history of the commune of Bourg le Roi between 50BC and 1450AD, examples of embroidered ecclesiastical vestments, wall hangings, tablecloths and items of clothing decorated with Point de Beauvais needlework. There is also a video to show the technique, and practical demonstrations each weekend in season.

One weekend each May, volunteers organize an **embroidery fair**, featuring articles for sale and demonstrations of many types of needlework. Great fun, as well as very interesting. Also organized are about forty **embroidery courses** each year, for a maximum of 3 people each, open to novices and experienced needleworkers alike. These take place in the museum itself.

Here are some examples of Point de Beauvais embroidery :



From Bourg-Le-Roi, drive to **Vivoin** (20km, 22')



The priory was acquired by the state in 1975, entirely restored and transformed into a cultural center.

A Benedictine foundation of the Marmoutier abbey in 1060, it is a major piece of religious architecture in Haut Maine, it was finished in the 16th century, blending the Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance styles of architecture.

The Musee de la vie d'autrefois (Museum of former times) has been created inside and explores folk art and historical traditions of the area. It is a small, but interesting museum, showcasing popular art and tradition.

It is open from 2:00 until 5:30 PM every day in July and August and there is lots of activity, costumed docents and demonstrations. In April, May, June, Sept. and Oct. it is only opened on weekends and holidays.

The Hotel du Chemin de Fer (between Vivoin and Beaumont/Sarthe will serve you a nice lunch (or dinner). Tel : 02 43 97 00 05



Return through **Beaumont-sur-Sarthe** (3km /6')

There is not much left of the Chateau de Beaumont, but its history is interesting : Towards the end of the 11th century, under repeated assaults of the English and Normans, Hubert de Beaumont lost his strongholds of Beaumont and Fresnay/Sarthe. He went to Ste Suzanne where he added a dungeon to the fortress and made the site so formidably well-defended, that after three long years of siege, William the Conqueror finally gave up !

Hubert de Beaumont earned the respect of his opponent, and, after a meeting in England, was given back the possessions he had lost, including the Chateau de Beaumont.

The Chateau changed hands many times during the Hundred Years' War, but, unfortunately for us, at the end of the XVth century, Louis XIth ordered the destruction of fortresses, to prevent attacks between local war lords.

If you would like to see another (private) chateau of the same epoch, but better preserved, there is one called the Chateau de Courmenant in Rouez-en-Champagne (close to Sille-Le-Guillaume). It too was outfitted with the first dungeons of a rectangular shape.

Public market in Beaumont-sur-Sarthe

