

# FACTS ABOUT THE THIÉRACHE

## THE REGION

The **Thiérache** covers an area of 2.500 km<sup>2</sup>, spread over 3 French departments (Aisne, Nord and Ardennes) and a southwestern part of Belgium (Chimay). It is a hilly region with many valleys, fatty meadows, forests and watercourses. It lies against the western side of the Ardennes and sometimes reaches heights of 300m.

The **Picardian Thiérache** or the **Thiérache of the Aisne** is the area between **Guise, Hirson, Chaourse en Vervins**, which is its capital.

## THE LANDSCAPE

Unlike other parts of Picardy, the Thiérache's subsoil contains an **impenetrable clay layer**, hence the many **streams and ponds**. The clay soil gives **greasy pastures** and so you see a lot of **dairy cows** and **apple trees**.

Its **bocage** or **hedge landscape** is one of the most beautiful in France.

## REGIONAL PRODUCTS

- **MAROILLES**: the Maroilles is an **AOC cheese** (*Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*) since **1976** and a **AOP** since **1996** (*Appellation d'Origine Protégée*). The **name Maroilles** is **protected by French and European legislation**: the French cheese with this name is guaranteed genuine and prepared according to the rules in force in France
- **CIDER**: the abundance of apple trees in the Thiérache has long been a thing of the past, but they are now being replanted considerably. The production of the cider is a regional speciality and it is also made for own consumption. In november the different apple harvests are seen on the courtyard, ready to be pressed and processed into cider.

Apple varieties from which cider is made in the Thiérache:

- The dello
- The roquet-vert
- The Sains Richaumont
- The Primerouge, created in Japan.
- The Melrose, of the USA.

## ECONOMY

- **SUGAR BEET**: nearly 400.000ha in France, of which 56.000 in the Aisne, which is the largest department of the Thiérache! France, together with Russia, is the **largest sugar producer** of Europa and the largest sugar producer of sugar beets in the world.
- Largest **COMPANIES** in the region:
  - Eberspächer in Hirson
  - Tereos in Montcornet
  - Materne in Boué
  - Nestlé in Boué
  - Mondelez (Lu) in Vervins
  - LVMH Fragrance Brands (Givenchy - Kenzo) in Vervins
  - West Pharmaceutical in Le Nouvion-en-Thiérache
  - Nespoli France in La Capelle

## ITS HISTORY LEAVES A UNIQUE PATRIMONY: THE FORTIFIED CHURCHES

The Thiérache has remained a **border area** over the centuries: by the **Treaty of Verdun in 843**, it belonged to France and was on the border with the Holy Roman Empire. Initially ruled by local counts and lords, it was added to the royal domain of France at the **end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century**.

In the same century, a new wave of **evangelization**, especially by the Prémontré and **Cistercians**, not only boosted the construction of abbeys, churches, villages and roads, but also stimulated the economy by improving various techniques (watermills, draining etc).

The **Hundred Years' War (14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries)** between France and England caused a lot of unrest and looting by the mercenaries and itinerant armies in the border region: a first wave of **fortifications** of the few stone buildings (especially churches) was a fact.

The **16<sup>th</sup> century** excelled in numerous conflicts and wars: Emperor Charles and his **Spaniards** plundered this border region, cities such as Vervins were burnt to the ground by Mary of Hungary, French **mercenaries**, such as Gassion and Turenne, and **Dutch** looters terrorized regularly the population. And in the meantime, also the **Wars of Religion**, between Catholics and Protestants, which were numerous in the Thiérache and which would continue the persecutions until well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, caused the necessary destruction. In between, during peaceful periods, the stone churches and "maisons fortes" were converted into

**military fortresses with keep- and watchtowers**, to protect the village population.

Also in the **17<sup>th</sup> century**, the population hid in its fortified churches, now to protect themselves against the armies of **Richelieu** and the **Austrians**. And the villagers always strengthened their church, with adapted **embrasures, fortified halls and refuge tower**. Thanks to **Louis XIV**, at the end of the 17th century the **border of France was drawn further north** and this fact was gradually the beginning of the end of the troubles in the Thiérache.