

ARLON, and the Festivities of the Maitrank

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Around the end of May every year, the pleasant town of Arlon celebrates the festival of the *Maitrank*. The ingredients of this tasty aperitif are dry white wine, cognac, liqueur, oranges, and a plant called woodruff (*galium odoratum*) ; the secret of its preparation has been kept as a tradition for generations.

The first mention to this May beverage dates back to the Middle Ages when a Benedictine monk of Prüm (now German land) used to offer this drink to the pilgrims and other voyagers coming to his abbey for help and hospitality. Why this nice drink became exclusive of the Arlon country is a mystery; how it crossed borders and arrived there is easily understandable if we recall the role played by this ancient town throughout the centuries.

Arlon - whose origins are as old as the Celtic period itself - was in fact a very important town during the Roman period due to its privileged situation at the crossroads to Trier, Metz, Reims and Cologne.

Later devastated and occupied by the Franks, Arlon regained prestige at the beginning of the XII century when Waleran IV married Ermesinda, countess of Luxemburg. This remarkable woman founded the *Abbey of Clairefontaine*, whose chapel is being restaured but can still be visited as well as the Saint Bernard's water source and the nearby ruins.

The Musée Luxembourgeois in Arlon houses Belgium's richest collection of Roman sculptures and artefacts of daily use. The museum also takes in objects and tools of the Frankish period, some of them of high historical value.

A tour of the town will include a visit to the churches Saint-Martin and Saint-Donat, and to the Synagogue, reputed to be the oldest building of the kind still standing in Belgium. Sited *rue des Thermes Romains*, you still find the remains of a Roman bath and of a basilica.

And whether you believe it or not, the river Semois has its source in Arlon, so be patient and look for the site; it is located at the angle between streets "rue Sonnetty" and "rue des Tanneries". If you follow this latter, you will then reach the Synagogue.

In the neighbourhood of Arlon, a few places are also worth a visit. The Victory Memorial Museum has the best collection of objects and tools of military interest, including military vehicles; it lies 5 Km from Arlon, direction Luxembourg, on the highway E411.

At the village of *Weyler* is located the Musée du Cycle. If you like bicycle riding and everything connected to it, then call Mr Tibesar at the (063) 217203 and go to 44 rue Stehnen for a visit to this small but rather interesting museum.

At *Autelbas* - another tiny village at the outdoors of Arlon, you can see the remainings of a Middle Ages centre of ceramic manufacture. Call Mr Jungen at the (063) 219736 for a reservation.

Last but not least, address yourself for further information to the *Syndicat d'Initiative*, at 2 rue des Faubourgs 6700 Arlon, or call the (063) 216360.

Enjoy your stay in Arlon, and if you are visiting this small but attaching town in May, then the *Maitrank* festivities are waiting for you!

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