



BOOM OF THE ABSINTHE DISTILLERIES ON TOURIST ROUTES

More and more new small distilleries are settling in the French Burgundy-Franche-Comté region and in neighbouring Switzerland. They can be found on the Absinthe tourist route.

"Bourgeois, La Semilla, Marguet,... the number of small distilleries on the Absinthe trail is constantly increasing" says, delighted, Elisabeth Contejean, director of the Tourist Office of Pontarlier. They settle next to the market leaders Guy and Pernot and illustrate the once again increasing popularity of absinthe. Tourists are welcome in this French-Swiss border region. They can discover the distillation equipment, try and buy absinthe and learn a lot about the history of this mystical elixir. Besides, often also secrets such as the existence of the "cold springs" are traded. Those springs, typical of the Jura Mountains, have a constant temperature of 4° C all year round and are specially equipped by volunteers. Absinthe, glasses, absinthe spoons and a money box await for hikers, in a hideaway. They drip a dash of the 'green fairy' into the cool spring water before continuing their way through the Middle Mountains. In return, they leave a small tip behind and report by phone if the bottle is almost empty.

Absinthe was invented at the end of the 18th century in the Val-de-Travers valley in Switzerland. Wormwood, aniseed, fennel, lemon balm and hyssop are macerated and distilled. Switzerland charged high export duties. That's why some Swiss distilleries decided to establish themselves in the neighbouring French town of Pontarlier, 837 meters above sea level.

Absinthe consumption really got going in 1830, after the colonial French armed forces used absinthe to purify their water. After their victorious return to France, they maintained their habit. They were served absinthe in the Parisian cafés and bistros of the garrison towns. The population imitated their successful heroes.

In the 19th century, absinthe developed into an aperitif drink par excellence. It experienced a boom around 1900, when there were 25 distilleries, 111 bistros, cafés and bars in Pontarlier and 15 million litres of absinthe were produced, of which 7 million litres only by the Pernod distillery.

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The "*Green Absinthe Hour*" was particularly popular amongst artists and writers such as Rimbaud, Verlaine, Toulouse Lautrec and Van Gogh. They hoped to find new inspiration for their works with a glass of absinthe. It was the heyday of cabarets, Moulin Rouge, Chat Noir, the golden age of the French Cancan.

However, with the increasing consumption of absinthe, it finally came to an abrupt end. On 17 March 1915, the French parliament unanimously passed the law banning the production and consumption of absinthe. On 7 October 1910 the Swiss people had already declared themselves in favour of banning absinthe.

The end of absinthe consumption gave birth to the myth of the forbidden drink and the black market. Absinthe was banished to the back room of bistros for many years. An absinthe-containing dessert for President Mitterrand at the time of prohibition caused a scandal.

Since May 2011, however, the spirit has again been allowed to be sold under its legendary name "absinthe". Ever since, the drink has been making a comeback and the tourist trail "*Route de l'Absinthe*", which was created in 2009, has a growing success.

Information about the Absinthe route: www.routedelabsinthe.com/en

